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EVERARD

KNOX MAGEE

MARK EVERARD

MARK EVERARD

A Romance

By KNOX MAGEE

AUTHOR OF "WITH RING OF SHIELD"

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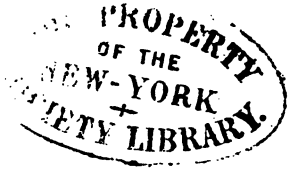

Mark Everard

MARK EVERARD

CHAPTER I.

"Come lasses and lads, get leave of your dads,
And away to the May-pole hie,
For ev'ry fair has a sweetheart there,
And the fiddler's standing by,
For Willy will dance with Jane
And Johnny has got his Joan,
To trip it, trip it, trip it, trip it,
Trip it up and down;
To trip it, trip it, trip it, trip it,
Trip it up and down."

Laughter, cheers and shouts came from the crowded court-yard, then couple after couple bounced into the ordinary, and took hasty possession of all tables and chairs they found vacant.

I was taking no part in the gayety, but was seated alone, except for Toby, on whom I have always looked as a kind of material shadow, whose presence is understood when I speak of myself, at a small table in a shadowy corner, that I might partake of my wine in peace, and at the same time enjoy the diversion of beholding London's highest and more common citizens sport and caper like so many

buffoons at a fair. But besides the mere enjoyment of gazing undisturbed upon this foolish spectacle I had another and better reason for being seated where I was. I wore no masque, as did all those whose names were known sufficiently to cause comment, or those without a name, who wore them that they might be mistaken for their betters. For this I had a reason: my lack of disguise was to serve in making me easily watched by them that required my assistance.

The room soon became filled with those that had just finished their dance for the time, and had given place to another set of light-heads, who now took up the song where the breath of their predecessors had failed:

"'You're out,' says Dick, 'Not I,' says Nick,
'Twas the fiddler play'd it wrong,'
'Tis true,' says Hugh, and so says Sue,
And so says ev'ry one;
The fiddler then began
To play the tune again,
And ev'ry girl did trip it, trip it,
Trip it to the men,
And ev'ry girl did trip it, trip it,
Trip it to the men."

While this part of the song was going on I saw the Red Masque making his way through the crowd, at the same time craning his neck and peering in all directions. I knew for whom he searched, so I arose and stood facing him until I was sure he had caught my eye, when I reseated myself and, while

waiting his approach, Toby and I split that that remained in the bottle between us.

"That's rare good stuff for a colic," said Toby, with a shake of his head and a great smack of the lips.

"And have you the complaint, Toby?" I asked, with a smile.

"Nay, not yet, Sir; but I like mightily to be prepared for an emergency; so I'm glad to have tucked that elixir under my belt this night, for I have a notion that I shall be exposed to the contagion ere morning."

"Hush!" I said, "not so loud; our merry Masque approaches."

"His hand seems more used to silken belts then sword-hilts," Toby whispered, as he watched the young gentleman making his way through the crowd, now stooping to kiss a laughing female's hand with a great show of gallantry and easy grace, again chucking another under the chin with careless familiarity, and lastly, as at length he reached the open space by our table, he stooped and kissed a little, hooded lass fairly upon her rosy lips. The maid, or whatever she was, (for in those days maidens were scarce, yet spinsters abundant) took the liberty with more than good grace, for as our Red Masque was turning from her with a smile and a kiss of his fingers, I heard her whisper through laughing lips:

"How sweet, my Lord Duke! 'Tis three long

days since you kissed me last at Whitehall." She curled her pretty lip until it touched her masque, as much as to say: "Ah! I know you, Sir, but you know me not," and ran laughing from him and vanished in the crowd.

The Red Masque started in surprise. He seemed to like it not that he was known, for he stood staring after the nimble lass, biting his lip the while. Then he shook his head and turned to me. He seemed excited and ill at ease, for he glanced to right and left suspiciously, then put a trembling hand upon my shoulder.

"We may not talk here," he said hurriedly. "Let us withdraw to a private chamber, for that that I have to say must not be heard by those that should not hear. I seem to have been recognized already."

"Unoccupied rooms are scarce to-night, I should think, Sir."

"I have thought of that, Master Everard. If you will follow me, I shall conduct you to a place of privacy."

As Toby started with us, the young gentleman turned and asked in a whisper who my companion was.

"My servant," I answered. "Possibly more useful than his master, if the work require a supple wrist."

This seemed to satisfy the stranger, for he smiled and nodded, and then, turning, made his way

through the noisy crowd, while we followed at a little distance, that we might not attract too much attention, as the business seemed like to be of great importance.

Slowly we worked our way across the room to the stairs, up which our leader went. But Toby and I halted on the first step until he had disappeared round the turning. Here I looked back across the room, and as I did so my eye caught three men watching us from near the table where we had been sitting. Two were tall, plainly attired and wore plain black masques. The third was of about middle height, stout, more gaily dressed, and wore a masque half black, half white. What attracted my attention was not any peculiarity of appearance, which, from my description, you can see was in no way peculiar, except for the masque of the least tall of the three, but as my eye reached them one of the tall gentlemen touched the Black-and-white Masque on the shoulder, and then the three looked quickly in our direction. But when they saw that I was watching them they turned away carelessly, as though their gaze had been but casual. Toby and I started up the stairs, but as we came to the turning I took another look back, and as I did so beheld the three Masques again watching us closely.

Our Red Masque was awaiting us at the top, and so soon as we joined him he led us to the door of a room just across the passage from the landing. At this he gave three gentle taps, paused for a second,

then added two more. The signal evidently was expected, for the door opened instantly and we were admitted to the chamber, which was without light until the door was again closed and locked, when a light was struck and we were able to take in our surroundings.

The room was of a good size, well furnished, and had another door and a window in the opposite wall to the door by which we had entered. The window, however, was closed and the shutters were up, and I heard this second door shut ere the candles were lighted.

"Great secrecy for an honest game," I thought, as I turned from my survey of the apartment to the gentleman of the red masque, that I might have an understanding of that for which he so earnestly desired my assistance. Of the other gentleman—the one by whom we had been admitted—I took no more notice than to observe that he was a tall and well-made man, who wore the ordinary masque of black, until our conductor introduced me.

"Henry," said he to his associate, "this is the gentleman of whom we have so much need—Master Everard, by name." Then, turning to me: "I trust, Sir, you will not take it as an offence that my friend prefers to have his name unspoken, though I assure you it is far from unknown."

"Doubtless, gentlemen," I replied, "you are both privileged to keep your names to yourselves; I have not asked for them; but until I know with whom I

have the honour to speak, you must excuse me for declining to engage in a conversation more serious than is customary in such an assembly."

"By Gad, Sir, you're exacting!" said he of the red masque. "Is it not sufficient when I tell you 'tis in the service of the King that we would have your assistance?"

"Had I not been informed that the work was a service to the King I had not so far disturbed myself as to be with you now. So far I have moved without question, but no further may I go. The King has many and various services performed for him; I beg leave to discriminate as to what kind I take part in."

"Oh! I see, Sir; your loyalty is of the qualified variety," the Red Masque sneered.

"Ay, Sir," I replied drily; "with honour."

"'Slife! Master Everard, are you so sentimental, then?" he laughed. "Well, then," he added seriously, "I assure you the matter in hand is one of honour, in fact 'tis the King's honour that we would save. 'Sblood! Sir, there are many gentlemen of my acquaintance would give their lives for such an opportunity."

"Honour, Sir, is so variously defined, nowadays, that I prefer to use my own interpretation in all things that concern me. You say many gentlemen of your acquaintance would feel honoured by the office; think you not then that they were better fitted for the service than a stranger? Gentlemen,

I regret that you have mistaken your man, and that I have inconvenienced myself for naught. I bid you good-evening. Under the circumstances I cannot assist you." I bowed and turned toward the door, forgetting that it was locked until I saw Toby try it. I turned again to the Masques. They were engaged in a low-toned conversation.

"Yes, yes, tell him; it can make but little difference," said he that had hitherto remained silent. Something more he added, but I could not catch what he said, the words being drowned by the noise of the merry-makers in the court-yard directly beneath the window of the room in which we were.

"Gentlemen," I said, as I saw the other still hesitate, "doubtless you mean me no insult, yet I am one that takes such treatment as this with but a poor grace. I demand either your confidence or my liberty."

Little Toby gave his shoulders a shake, (which movement always has reminded me of the splutter of a sparrow after a dip in a puddle, and always is a signal that he is prepared for trouble) and kept his eyes on me, waiting his cue.

"Damn my fingers, Master Everard! but your temper is as short as your sword is long," cried the Red Masque, with a laugh. "No, no, on my honour no offence was meant; 'twas but over-caution on my part. You shall know all." He undid his masque and let me see his features.

"Your Grace!" I cried in feigned surprise, though all the time I had had my suspicions that it was Monmouth himself.

"Sh! Master Everard, name me not in this place," he said in a low tone. Then he came closer and whispered: "Make no mention of name nor title when this gentleman removes his masque," and he nodded in the direction of his companion, who now undid his visard.

I raised my hat and, bending till its feathers swept the floor, saluted him in silence. It was the King. He made a slight bow and smiled a little as he asked me if I now was satisfied.

"Perfectly, so far as the persons with whom I deal are concerned."

"And are you prepared to serve me in what may be a dangerous matter?"

I drew myself up with a little flush. "Most matters in which I take a part are commonly called dangerous, Sir," I answered quietly.

"Damnation take me if ever I have seen such a fire-brand!" the Little Duke cried out, after staring at me in surprise for a moment. Then he burst into laughter. "Zounds! 'tis as dangerous to be thy friends as 'tis to be thy foes."

"Hush, James! not so loud," said the King. "Do you hear aught amiss, my man?" he asked quickly, but in a low voice, and we all turned to see Toby with his ear to the key-hole of the door leading into the passage. As we looked he quickly placed his

lips to the hole and gave vent to a strong puff. Instantly there was a startled sound directly outside, then hasty footsteps creaked without.

Monmouth laughed; but the King handed me the key and I hastily unlocked the door and stepped forth. But the eavesdropper had profited by the delay in making good his escape, for the passage was empty and nothing was to be heard but the noise of the merry-makers below. So I returned to the room and relocked the door. I found Monmouth half-choking with a fit of laughter, and the King himself was smiling broadly.

"'Sblood!" cried the Duke, the moment the door was closed, "'twas as good as a play to see that fellow give Master Spy a start. I'll warrant me he could not have been startled more had you fired a pistol into his ear. 'Sdeath! I can almost see the expression on his face." And he gave way freely to his laughter.

Toby seemed not in the least confused by this attention from royalty; on the contrary, he took it with an indifference that one would think came from a life-long acquaintance with kings. He stood with his hat tucked under one arm, while with the other he leaned upon the back of a chair and smiled back at the King's son with an ease of manner laughable to behold. I think it was Toby's look rather than his act of blowing through the key-hole that caused his Majesty to smile so broadly. Whatever it was, he seemed mightily pleased, for he

nods to both of us, still smiling, and he says: "I doubt not the work will be well done."

I bowed in acknowledgment of the compliment and remained silent, awaiting his further speech.

"The business in hand, Master Everard," he continued, as he seated himself carelessly upon a corner of the table, and with his stick made passes at his toe as he swung it to and fro, "requires most careful handling, for it concerns the welfare of England no less than it concerns me. That is why I desire the work to be done by you, for were I to have a body of soldiers do it the whole world must needs know of a matter that would sound far from well, and would be made much of by them that would even stoop to say that I was party to this most contemptible of plots. This gentleman"—and with his stick he indicated Monmouth—"it was, that by accident learned the designs of the daring traitors, and he it was also that told me of your great experience and ability in performing these secret and daring services."

I again bowed and remained silent, while he took his own time in giving me my instructions.

"This night," resumed the King, "there is at this place—even there, among the dancers without—a lady that must be escorted from here in such manner as shall assure her safety. That lady, Sir,"—and I leaned forward to catch what he said, so low did he speak—"is a no less personage than the Queen."

'Twas evident from the King's manner that he expected me to be surprised by his statement, for he paused and watched me closely after he had told me of the Queen's presence at the May-pole dance. If he was possessed of any doubts as to my knowledge of the doings of kings and queens, my manner, I think, dispelled them; for I had not been a soldier of fortune for something over ten years—most of which time was spent in the service of kings and princes—without having learned that such a little thing as a queen in a masque at a May-pole dance (or a much worse even) is not of sufficient moment to cause surprise; that is, when kings and queens are in the habit of doing things less innocent with every passing day.

"Well," continued the King, "some audacious scoundrels, possessed of more impudence than brains, have formed a most monstrous plot, with no less an object than the abduction of her Majesty. This they think successfully to accomplish by reason of the very boldness of the enterprise and also because the Queen has come without an escort, which, of course, was the only way she could come to such a place."

"Is it known, Sir, in what place the abduction is to be attempted?" I asked.

"Yes, 'tis fortunate we have some knowledge as to that. Their plan is, as I believe, to follow her Majesty's chair when she shall leave this place, and somewhere between here and Whitehall—the exact

spot we have not knowledge of—they think to overpower her chairmen and thus carry her off without opposition."

"Do you know their force, Sir?"

"James," said the King, "was't not but three the message said?"

"Ay," Monmouth answered, "but there may be more. 'Twould be a good plan for assuring them that the guard would be small—that is, supposing the note was meant to fall into my hands."

"Had they reason to suppose you suspected such a plot before the note you speak of was penned?" I asked, turning to the Duke.

"Split me! no; for I knew not even that the lady would be here until by seeming chance I came upon this note."

"Then the conspirators could have no object in permitting such information of their plans to come into your hands. For this reason I am convinced that their number will not exceed three, providing, of course, that they have not learned of your possession of the note, which 'tis likely they do know of. But no matter," I went on; "I am willing to undertake the service, and to take the chance of there being more, if you are pleased to trust the matter to my hands."

"Then the commission is yours, Sir," said the King.

"Do you know the names of any of the conspirators, Sir?"

"Nay, but I have my suspicions. Of one thing we may be well assured, and that is they are no common robbers. I half suspect a person of high standing as their leader; but I shall not give him a name, lest I wrong the innocent. But, Master Everard, if you can catch their leader, you never shall have cause in the future to say a Stuart knows not how to reward, even though we wreck an adage by the payment," and he laughed silently at his own expense.

"At what hour will the lady leave?"

"We have one set to watch and inform us as to her movements."

"Does the lady know aught of the plot?"

"Nay, nay; nor may she, or our plans to capture the plotters may miscarry, through a woman's natural timidity. Let her not know that you go with her, lest she become alarmed."

"How shall I know her from another in the crowd?"

"Come with me and I shall show you." He blew out the candles and led the way to the door that had hitherto remained closed. This he now opened, and we three (for Toby still stood at his post by the inner door) stepped forth upon a small balcony that ran some half-dozen paces along this side of the house.

At first we could see nothing clearly in the court-yard below, because of the great glare and smoke from the torches; but as our eyes became used to these difficulties we were able, first to distinguish

men from women, then—by their capers—the younger from their less nimble companions, and finally the different and ridiculous costumes of the Toms o'Bedlam, who danced, sang, tooted horns and cut capers unceasingly around the stately, garlanded, and ribbon-decked pole which stood in the centre blushing for its foolish surroundings.

The King and Monmouth peered into the throng for some moments ere the former espied that for which he sought. Then he quickly drew forth his handkerchief and moved it up and down several times.

"Do you see those scarfs moving on the benches yonder?" he asked quickly, as he caught me by the arm and pointed to the opposite side of the court, where stood long rows of benches, placed one above another and crowded with spectators of both sexes, all ages, qualities and costumes. On the third bench from the bottom of one of these tiers was seated a masqued man, who was keeping time with the tune then progressing by waving two white scarfs, one in each hand. Directly in front of him, and sitting on the next seat below, were two ladies, one seemingly tall and the other short, that is, as well as one could judge from their appearance while seated. The only details in which they differed from the scores of others was in their masques, which covered their faces completely, instead of hiding the upper features only, as did the masques of most of those present, and, besides, they both wore cherry-coloured

cloaks, with hoods that left no feature showing. Truly, 'twould take a most wondrous sharp eye to penetrate such disguises. Seated one on each side of the two ladies were two large men, not masqued, and plainly dressed.

"Do you see?"

"Ay, Sir."

Again his Majesty waved his handkerchief, and the man seated behind the two ladies ceased keeping time to the music.

"The shorter lady is your charge, Sir. The other is doubtless one of her ladies. Now you'll have two on your hands. 'Od's fish! Master Everard, I envy you not your work."

"Are the men on each side their attendants?"

"Ah! I had not noted that. They have the look of chairmen. Good powerful looking fellows. They may render you substantial assistance."

"There is but one point in this affair that I like no better than I understand," I said, as we again entered the room and closed the door.

"What is that?" asked Monmouth quickly.

I struck a light ere I answered.

"And that point is how it comes about that we were spied on after we entered this room." I know not why I said this; for the presence of the eavesdropper at the door might easily be explained by granting that the plotters knew of the Little Duke's possession of the note of which he spoke, and also supposing that they had recognised him, despite his

disguise, and watched him enter the room with Toby and me. But I ever have made it a rule to trust few men until they have been tried and proved true; and in this case I felt no inclination to make the Duke of Monmouth an exception. There was something in his manner that I did not like, though whether this was natural to him, or the result of excitement caused by his knowledge of the plotters' plans, I could not tell for a surety. I had my suspicions that it might come from his possession of a greater knowledge of the plot than he chose to make known to me, whence came my remark that I neither liked nor understood the presence of the eavesdropper. 'Twas a good shaft, and I shot it well, but though the Duke was at times transparent, yet in this case, either my suspicions were groundless or Monmouth was no mean actor; for he nodded his head thoughtfully and replied:

"Yes, Sir, it looks as though they know of our discovery. That was why I said they may have meant the note for me. Think you not, Sir," he said, turning to the King, "that more men should be placed at Master Everard's disposal. They might follow at some little distance, and need know nothing of the matter unless Master Everard signals for their help."

If it was acting, 'twas mighty well done; but still, for some reason that I cannot explain, I could not help suspecting him. I felt sure there was something hidden from me; so I determined to pursue

my own course in this matter, without regard to his suggestions.

"What say you, Master Everard? Do ye need more men?" the King asked.

"No, Sir; I prefer to conduct the business without other assistance than Toby's good sword and my own."

"I like it that you choose that course; 'tis better every way."

I had my eye on Monmouth while the King spoke, but I learned nothing from his manner. 'Tis possible I should have learned more had he not worn the masque.

"What way do you intend to go?" the Duke questioned.

I hesitated. Was it wise to let him know my plans?

"Yes, what way?" the King put in.

Now I must answer; and yet I disliked the thought of revealing my plans to the Little Duke.

"I think, Sir, I shall permit the ladies to take whatever course they please," I answered.

"Yes, yes, that is best," said the King; and the Duke also seemed pleased with the idea.

But I now was determined that I would make as sure as possible that I should not run across Monmouth nor permit any of his plans to interfere with the successful carrying out of my commission that night; so just before Toby and I left the room I said to the King:

"I think, Sir, there is more in this matter than appears. I counsel, therefore, that you keep his Grace close by your side. Separate not for a moment, lest your Majesty be the object of some more daring outrage."

"Do you think they would dare attempt anything against me?"

"They have the daring, it would seem, to attempt the abduction of the Queen."

"Tut! 'tis absurd, Sir!" said the Duke, quite impatient and annoyed.

"Still, James, 'tis better to be safe. And as Master Everard has charge of this difficult business, 'twould be scant courtesy we should show him did we not follow his advice."

"But I fail to see what object Master Everard can have in wishing to control our actions. We have not asked his protection for ourselves."

"But I say we will follow his advice, James. Let there be no further discussion."

Monmouth bit his lip, shrugged his shoulders and remained silent, while Toby and I uncovered, bowed and, when the King again had blown out the candles, left the room to take our place below, that we might watch for the Queen to leave.

I had gained my point with the young Duke. If he was acting honestly his remaining with the King for the remainder of the evening would be no hardship. If, as I could not help suspecting—though without any reason—he had some card hidden in his

sleeve, and was waiting a chance to play it, why then I had taken a wise precaution against having a surprise confront me. I was too old a hand at this kind of business not to know that surprises, no matter of what sort, are worth guarding against. And even if I had felt sure that Monmouth's plans were meant for my benefit I should not have cared to be associated in so particular an undertaking with so impatient and reckless a young man.

"He's mighty anxious for us to have a crowd with us, Sir," said Toby quietly, and we started down the stairs.

"So you noted that too, eh, Toby?"

"'Twas sticking right out of him, Sir."

"Well, Toby, we'll handle this alone, as we have many another ere this."

"I'm glad you got him shut up with his dad; I think he's too old for his years, Sir."

By this we almost had reached the bottom of the stairs, so our conversation ceased while we made our way through the crowd, which now was commencing to become less thick. As we stepped into the court-yard my shoulder almost brushed against the Black-and-white Masque, who was stationed beside the door with his back to the wall. Doubtless he was there to watch for us, for when he saw me he straightened himself up and stared at me boldly, while I returned his look with an amused smile, as I twirled my mustaches carelessly and walked on, turning my face partly over my shoulder

as I went, and still half-smiling at him. Toby strutted at my side like a bantam cock, twirled his mustaches as did I—for in all things he imitated me most ludicrously, even to the wearing of hair on the upper lip, which had become unfashionable—but, instead of appearing amused, looked most comically pugnacious.

We made our way in a semicircle, that we might keep at some distance from the dancers, until we reached a point almost opposite the balcony, where I had stood with the King. Here I had a good view of the benches where sat the Queen and her companion, and here also I could watch the balcony and the door by which we had left standing the Black-and-white Masque. When I looked back to the door, however, he was not to be seen there. Doubtless he was watching us from some other position. Well, so long as he would keep his eye on me—which I felt he would continue to do—why then there was no need for me to watch him. Without knowing it he was saving me a vast lot of trouble.

Soon the merry-makers began to weary of their sport; the spectators lost interest in the entertainment, and one by one they wandered off. We watched the benches closely. Presently I saw the Queen, after a whispered conference with her companion, rise and leave the stand, the taller lady, the two large men and the gentleman that had waved the scarfs following almost immediately. I nudged Toby, and we began to wind in and out through the

crowd, never losing sight of the ladies as they passed out of the court. They turned down a short lane and, after going about two score paces, stopped before another smaller alley running off to the left. Into this place went the large men, while the third —he that was masqued—stood in a shadowy corner some distance in the rear of the ladies and on the other side of the lane. Toby and I were but a few paces behind him and also screened from the light of the street-lamp. I looked back, but could see no sight of any of the conspirators. That part of the lane between the court-yard that we had just left and us was deserted, they that were leaving the dance turning the other way, into the main thoroughfare. This discovery, that they were not behind us, puzzled me not a little. Had they given up their plans when they learned that precautions were being taken to prevent their plot from succeeding? I wondered. No, that could not be it, or the Black-and-white Masque would not have been so on guard at the door when I came out. There was something here that I could not make out. So much more reason, then, for my being more cautious than ever. If they were preparing a surprise for me, they should learn before they were through with this affair that they were dealing with two men that were used to all kinds of attempts at surprise. If they should beat us, they always should have reason to remember their victory; 'twould be a performance of which to be proud.

Presently two chairs were brought out from the little alley. Into these our charges now stepped, and the four men (for two more chairmen had returned with the fellows that had entered the place) took up their burdens and started off at a good round pace.

So soon as the masqued man ahead of us saw them start off he turned about and hastily started back. We pressed more into the shadow and permitted him to pass at a run, without seeing us. Straight back he went the way he had come and into the court-yard again he turned. He had waved his scarfs to the King. Was he returning to report to his Majesty, or to the conspirators—or to the Duke of Monmouth?

But now I had no time for the serious considering of this; I was obliged to follow the two chairs, which rapidly were fading from view, as they hastened down the lane. We started after them, running lightly and almost silently until we had come to within about fifty yards of them, when we slackened our pace to about that at which they were going, that we might keep about that distance between us. Soon they turned to the right into a broader street, along which they went at the same good pace. We followed at the same distance.

Now we had our faces turned westward, and if they would but keep to the principal streets and continue the same rate of speed, we should be at Whitehall in half an hour. The plotters would not

dare molest them, except in some deserted, lonely place.

"So long as they but keep to the main streets, they are safe. Surely they will have the good sense to give lonely places a wide berth," I whispered to Toby.

"Look!"

At this moment a large coach rolled past at no slow pace, also headed to the west. A moment later it was followed by another at the same speed. From the window of the first of these a man's head was leaning out, as though he watched for something. We quickened our pace to a run, keeping as close as possible behind the second coach, and yet a little to one side, that I might not lose sight of the man at the window of the first coach. As they drew near the chairs their speed slackened, and at the moment of passing, the man at the window leaned farther out, turned his head and stared back at the chairs. At that moment they came directly opposite to a street light. The glare shone straight in his face. . . . He wore a masque of black-and-white.

Toby and I rushed forward, seized the axle of the rear coach and climbed up behind, and while we rolled on again at full speed I whispered my directions in Toby's ear; for now I knew what was coming, and my plan of action was complete.

On we went for several hundred yards, drew up with a jolt for a moment, then turned to the south, down a poorly-lighted and deserted lane.

I had been expecting something like this to happen, but until we turned I could think of no way in which the conspirators could assure themselves that the chairs would follow them, providing they did not previously know the exact route the ladies intended taking on their return to the Palace. But as we turned down the lane toward Fleet Street everything was made clear. The jolt that I have mentioned just before we turned was sufficiently abrupt and strange, after the seeming haste of a moment before, to arouse my curiosity as to its cause; so I cautiously leaned my head a little past the side of the coach and took a peep at that that was ahead of us.

As the conveyance stopped, there came to my ears loud and boisterous singing and cheering. I stared on past the horses, and there, two score of yards ahead of us, a great bonfire blazed in the middle of the street, and around it capered a throng of merry-makers. Judging by the quality of their song and roughness of their hoots and laughter, they were a low and drunken crowd, lower by far than the dancers in the court-yard of the inn we had left.

I had time only sufficient for taking in this lewd scene at a glance, for now both coaches turned sharply to the left, down the lane of which I have made mention.

Again I looked out past the side of the coach. The first coach was rapidly drawing away from us, as it dashed down the narrow street at a gallop,

whilst our pace slackened to a gentle trot, and then to a walk. Wondrous strange conduct, but yet I thought I saw through their plans. I made no sound, but leaned yet farther out and strained my eyes to keep sight of the coach that was plunging into, and burying itself in, the gloom ahead of us.

"Ha! very good. You are smart boys, smart boys; but boys nevertheless. The two-coach plan is good, 'tis original, and might reasonably be expected to succeed, providing, of course, that you had other men to deal with than Mark Everard and Toby Hunt, and also having a care that these same two old soldiers—Mark and Toby—did not take it into their heads to climb on behind the second coach. Ha! ha!" I chuckled softly to myself, "you are playing the game nicely, but I swear the money is rolling our way without your knowledge," and I poked Toby in the ribs with my elbow as I saw the first coach turn sharply to the left and, still at a gallop, disappear.

It was now necessary that we should act quickly, so I gave the little man a few more whispered directions—for my plan was now slightly changed—and then we stood ready, awaiting the time when we should lead the music.

We had not long to wait; for as we drew near the street into which the first coach had turned, we came to a halt. One of the doors opened and a gruff voice asked: "All clear there, my man?"

"Ay, Sir," replied the coachman, "the lane

seems empty. The people all are up at the bonfire, Sir."

"'Tis a mighty sharp night for the first of May. Do you think we shall have long to wait?"

"Oh, no, Sir, the chairs'll be here in five minutes, and the other coach'll be right behind them, Sir."

The driver was leaning over the right side of his seat, his head turned toward the open door. This gave Toby his opportunity to descend quietly from his perch and make his way slowly but surely along the left side, past the unsuspecting driver and to the heads of the horses.

"Well, I think I shall——"

Toby gave a sharp whistle, his signal to me that he had reached his place. The coachman sprang upright on his seat and called out sharply: "Who's there?" The man at the window leaned farther out, awaiting Toby's answer.

I knew the little man never would be stuck for an answer, but I swear it caught my breath when it took the form of a song. But such it was, and *extempore* at that:

"He says, says he:
'Now who be ye?'
My answer is:
'The same to thee'."

Had I not known that Toby was the only one at the heads of the horses, I should have been willing to swear 'twas some harmless drunkard returning

home from his celebration of the holiday. I almost laughed aloud in spite of myself.

"Get out o' there, now, or I'll go down and give you a taste o' boot leather!" cried the driver angrily and made a move as though to carry out his threat.

"No, don't leave the reins," said the man at the door. "I shall attend to him." And he stepped to the ground and started forward.

I had not looked for this, for I had expected the driver to get down from his seat to remove Toby. However, 'twas of but little moment how we should overpower them, so long as it would not take long; too much time had been wasted already. So I descended from my position behind the coach, so soon as I heard the man at the door say he would remove Toby, and started quickly but quietly after him, the moment his back was turned. I raised the hilt of my sword to knock him quietly on the head, but not relishing the thought of perhaps killing the fellow whilst his back was turned, I changed my mind and stuck the blade between his legs, at the same time hurling my weight against his shoulders. He lurched forward, his hands spread out to save himself, and sprawled at full length in the mud, at the same time uttering a cry of dismay, which was immediately followed by a string of oaths, as I rolled him upon his back and proceeded to unbuckle his sword-belt, with which I purposed to bind his arms to his sides.

At that moment the driver sprang to the ground

and with a muttered curse rushed upon me, the butt of his heavy whip thrown back for a blow at my head. The moment he sprang from his seat Toby called out a warning, so I was not caught napping. The whip handle whistled through the air; I sprang to one side, and the man that I had been binding received the blow upon his ribs. I caught the wrist of the coachman ere he could step back. With a quick jerk I landed him fairly upon the top of his unfortunate companion, who between groans cursed the bungling driver for all the fools and knaves unhung, in the most approved manner. Both struggled manfully to regain their feet; and at last, to force him to submit, I was compelled to give the driver a blow upon the neck with my clenched fist. This treatment quieted him most marvelously. He stretched out flat upon his face and made no more move, whilst I hastily completed the binding of the other's arms; after which I securely fastened the coachman's hands behind his back with a piece cut from the lash of his whip, which operation brought him to his senses. I then tightly gagged the driver with my scarf, and the other with his own.

"Now, into the coach, if you please," I invited, taking them by the collars and assisting them to rise. "Come, Toby, and give me a hand; the horses, I think, will not move," I called. Then, when we had them both placed in the front seat, we took another piece of the whip-lash and bound

their feet together—"That there may be something to draw you to each other,"—as Toby remarked to them.

It has taken me some little time to describe the capture of these two conspirators; but from the time when the coach came to a halt until they were both prisoners, safely lodged within the coach, more than five minutes could not have elapsed. 'Twas lucky it took us no longer, for as Toby climbed to the coachman's seat I caught the sound of an approaching coach. Looking back up the lane I could dimly make out a great dark object, preceded by another, which, I made no doubt, was the chairs, all coming along at a good swinging pace. I did not know how the plotter whose place I had taken, and whose part I was about to play, had planned to act when the chairs should reach the place where we waited; but I did not hesitate to act in my own way, and abide by the result. On they came, the stalwart chairmen almost running. Now they were a score of yards away; now ten, and their pace slackened a little; now five paces, and they came still slower; now they turned to one side to pass the coach—and I stepped forth and faced them. They came to an instant halt—and who would not, when the point of a sword is held under one's nose? Then, to my great surprise, they put down the chair. I gasped in surprise. Was there treachery here, too? Ha! I saw through it. The tall lady, who stepped lightly forth, was also

in the plot. I must now act with lightning quickness. Doubtless she would not expect to find two prisoners in the coach, toward the door of which she now stepped as readily as if 'twere her own, and had been ordered by her to be in waiting there.

"Madam," I whispered hastily (I feared to speak in my natural tones, lest she might know my voice belonged not to be man that she expected) "be not alarmed by the presence of the men within; they are my prisoners." And I gave her my hand and assisted her to her seat.

As she stepped in I heard a rush of feet, a scuffle, oaths, and above all else a woman's fearful screams. 'Slife! the Queen had the voice of a screech-owl. Zooks! enough to make any man come to her assistance, if for no other reason than that he might preserve his hearing. I rushed back to her Majesty's chair, where a savage fight was taking place between two chairmen and the two conspirators from the other coach, while the Queen was furnishing the music from her chair. As I came up one of the chairmen, with a groan, fell to the ground, where he lay, coughing out his life in bloody mouthfuls. I sprang to the chair, grasped the little screaming lady in my arms and started back toward the carriage. Did I say owl? I should have said cat. Zounds! the skin was gone from the side of my nose before I could swear.

A hand was placed upon my shoulder, "No, no; the other coach," said a man's voice at my side, and

I turned to see the tall Black Masque, who had just killed the chairman.

I paid no heed to what he said, but hastened to the door of the coach, which was but a half-dozen paces distant.

"I say the other coach! Do you hear? Are you mad, man?" And again he seized my shoulder, roughly, as we reached the carriage door.

I saw Toby spring to the ground,—resting quietly whilst a fight was in progress was more than he could bear,—so I paid no more attention to the conspirator, but swung the door open and thrust her Majesty not too gently in. My two prisoners were struggling with their bonds, rubbing their heads against the shoulders of each other in their efforts to displace the tight scarfs that prevented them from calling out.

"Cease your attempts to get free," I said roughly, "or you shall compel me to soothe you with cold steel." And I seized one by the shoulder and gave him a shake, that he might know that he was within my reach.

The Queen made but one more frantic effort to destroy the remains of my beauty, then, with a scream that put to shame her former efforts, she leaned back in her seat and sobbed foreign prayers into her handkerchief.

All this was accompanied by the click of swords, for the moment I had thrown the coach door open and thrust the Queen within, the masqued con-

spirator behind my back with a cry, "'Tis that damned Everard!" sprang forward, his blade pointed to spit me. But Toby I never have known to act too late. As the sword of the Masque darted forward another blade clicked sharply against it, and the point of my assailant passed harmlessly a foot above my head.

At this moment cries for help came from where the Black-and-white Masque was struggling with the remaining faithful chairman. The other two traitors, who had stood inactive, now rushed to the spot whence came the call, whilst Toby's sword still clicked against the weapon of his adversary, whom the little swordsman was forcing to give ground rapidly. But now I had the Queen safely shut in the coach, so I ran to the assistance of the faithful chairman. The two knaves had just pulled him off the Black-and-white Masque, who, as I came up, showed a lightness of heels not in keeping with his girth. I sprang at the two chairmen, who were holding the loyal fellow down. They waited not my coming, but followed the example of their master. I dashed after them, but my foot caught on the corpse of the man that had been killed by the fellow that Toby now fought, and I measured my length in the half-dry mud. As I fell Toby called out, "Run, coward!" and the Black Masque sprang over me and dashed up the lane after the others.

I quickly picked myself up and started in pursuit. But they had too great a start. As I drew near

the coach the driver lashed his horses; they bounded forward into a space beside the lane, and at a gallop turned back toward the bonfire.

I turned to the badly bruised chairman and asked him how he did. He stood in an attitude of defence, the point of a sword resting on the ground before him.

"Who are you, Sir?" he asked.

"I fear you would know me no better were I to tell you my name. That I have saved the ladies you can see for yourself. Is not that sufficient to assure you that I mean you no harm?"

"True, you have saved the ladies from others; but how do I know where you intend to take them, Sir? I know not who they are, but I am paid to bear them safely, and I'll do my duty."

"As for that, my faithful fellow, if you can drive, you may do so, providing you make for—say Whitehall."

He hesitated a moment.

"Come, we must make haste; the knaves may return with re-enforcements. What shall we do with this poor corpse?" I nodded to his dead comrade.

"Poor John! He was a man, Sir, he was. I'll come back for him, after we get the ladies home, Sir. Poor old John!"

We carried the corpse and laid it by the chairs at the side of the lane. The chairman climbed to the coachman's seat and untied the reins from where

Toby had fastened them to keep the horses from starting off while the fight was on.

"They're making an awful row in there, Sir," said Toby, jerking his thumb toward the door. "I had to jab one of them fellows, Sir, to make him quiet, and that started the women to yell louder than ever, Sir." He shook his head in disgust.

I opened the door and looked in. The prisoners were now quiet—evidently Toby's "jab" had taught them a lesson in good behaviour—but the ladies were embracing each other and one was sobbing unrestrainedly. Zooks! 'tis no wonder Toby was disgusted.

"Up to the coachman's seat, Toby. Let that fellow drive. We must make haste or we may be waylaid ourselves.

"Now, Sir," I said, addressing the more important of my prisoners, "if you please to move over a bit you may have the pleasure of my company." Then, as I took my place and slammed the door shut—which seemed to justify the Queen in giving another deafening scream—we started on at a good pace.

"Now, Madam," I said to her Majesty, "be not alarmed. You have been rescued from a most dastardly plot, the object of which you may guess. These men, who are my prisoners, were captured in the cowardly attempt. Their companions unfortunately escaped." I might as well have talked to the moon; in faith, much better; for the more I

said the more she jabbered. Not so the other lady. The moment I told her she had been rescued from a band of abductors she started and, sitting bolt up right, demanded:

"And what may you be, Sir?"

"I may be many things, Madam; but one thing I am not, and that is the dupe of abductors—nor of the abducted neither," I added meaningly.

She said not another word, but sank back beside the Queen, around whom she put her arm. This at last quieted her Majesty, who soon uttered no further sound than an occasional sob, half stifled in her handkerchief.

And thus, without more incident, we came ere long to Whitehall.

CHAPTER II.

THAT night, before I left the Palace, the King gave me orders to report to him the next morning, about the hour of ten, as he should then be at leisure to hear a detailed description of the attempted abduction of the Queen.

Accordingly, at the appointed time I presented myself in the King's anteroom, fully expecting to be kept waiting for an hour or more, while the lazy monarch should finish his dreams. Great, then, was my surprise when, the moment I entered the room, a gentleman hastened to me and asked if I was Master Everard. In faith he had no great crowd to choose from, there being but three or four others present. I answered that I was; whereupon he informed me that the King had been most anxiously awaiting me for the past hour.

"Something more must have been learned concerning the conspirators," I thought, as I followed my conductor across the room toward another chamber. "It must be of vast importance, truly, to cause the indolent Charles to rise thus early. Has he discovered the name of the leader of the three?" I wondered. For the night before he had been sadly disappointed because we had not caught

the other tall, Black Masque; for the fellow we had captured turned out to be a subordinate, the tool of some more powerful knave.

The King was pacing to and fro across the room when I entered, his head bowed, his brows contracted in a frown, and his hands clasped behind his back. He halted and looked up quickly when my name was announced, then came toward me eagerly, his swarthy features brightening, as though my coming had lifted a burden from him.

"Ha! Everard," he said quickly, "I am pleased mightily to see you. There's more work been cut out for you and your little devil."

'Twas fortunate Toby was not present, or he should have dropped dead instantly; his indignation surely would have burst him.

"Does it concern the same persons with whom we dealt last night, Sir?"

"Ay, ay, they must be the same knaves. 'Od's fish! I should like the pleasure of seeing them strung up by their necks. Zooks! the next thing I expect is to be carried off, bed and all, some night whilst I sleep. This sort of outrage must come to a halt. I have permitted too much freedom about the Court. If the ingrates will abuse their liberty, why, I must make an example that will teach them a lesson."

'Twas laughable when the King said he permitted too much freedom about the Court. He had set the example himself, and on his own head rested

the onus of having the most dissolute Court in Europe. Possibly I should say after France; for it is doubtful to which of these two belonged this unenviable distinction.

I twirled my mustaches patiently while his Majesty made several more turns to and fro before me.

"You know the lady that accompanied the Queen last night, Sir?" said he presently, as he came to an abrupt halt before me.

"Not personally, Sir."

"Nay, nay! I mean you remember the lady?" he laughed.

"I do indeed, Sir."

"You saw her enter the Palace by a private door with her Majesty last night?"

"I did, Sir. I held the door open whilst both the ladies entered," I replied, wondering what object he could have in asking these foolish questions.

"Well, Sir, since that time she has disappeared."

"Zooks!"

"Zooks! You might swear less mildly, and still not be extravagant. What make you of it?"

I gave my mustaches a few thoughtful pulls ere I asked: "Were there any signs of violence?"

"No, not so far as I can learn."

I had an idea how it had happened, but I did not like the thought of informing the King of how willing the said lady was to leave her chair and step into the coach. Instead, I drew forth the sword of

the Black-and-white Masque, which, you will remember, was picked up by the one faithful chairman after I had driven the two knaves from him. Toby had got it from the fellow after we reached the Palace, and I brought it with me this morning, in place of my own, that I might show it to the King; for engraven on the blade, near the hilt, was a crest and the name: *Sir Alfred Heron;* and his Majesty, I made no doubt, would know something of this Sir Alfred. Without a word I handed it to the King, my finger pointed to the name.

"'Sir Alfred Heron,'" he read. "Why, Master Everard, how come you by this gentleman's sword?"

"Well, Sir, the owner of the weapon left the lane in such haste last night, when he and his friends tried so unsuccessfully to carry off the Queen, that he forgot to take the blade along with him."

"What is this? Sir Alfred in the plot? Why, Sir, 'twas his own daughter he was attempting to abduct. The lady was Mistress Heron. 'Od's fish! I see through it now. 'Tis her father that has carried her off!"

I regretted being the instrument that conveyed the knowledge to the King that Sir Alfred had carried off his daughter. Who had a better right to abduct her? I began to see through the whole affair now, though still there were several points that I could not understand. If this Sir Alfred's only object was the taking away of his daughter from the Court, why had his companion been so

anxious to have me put the Queen into the other coach? Why should they have molested the Queen at all? And then again, how was it that Monmouth should have been so well acquainted with the plans of the plotters? I still had my suspicions of the Little Duke. Sir Alfred might have most excellent reasons for wishing his daughter to leave the Court —doubtless the young lady had good reasons herself —still the actions of this same Sir Alfred were, to say the least, suspicious. I was not sure that he was deserving of sympathy. However, I now should be on my guard. I should learn for what the King wanted me. He should do the talking; I soon might be placed in a position where it would be in my power to sift this matter to the bottom. Then I could decide who were the deserving and who the guilty. It would be time then for the bestowing of sympathy. Meantime I would keep my thoughts to myself. They there would be in no one's way.

The King paced back and forth angrily, jerking out short, quick sentences, besprinkled most liberally with oaths. I could not catch all that he said, for his words seemed addressed more to himself than me. But I distinctly heard him repeat several times: "Ha! Sir Alfred, so 'tis you, after all. I have been on the wrong scent. So, so, that is the way you would thwart me! 'Od's fish! you have taken the wrong course. 'Tis time I put my foot down. Zooks! I'll not be so boldly defied.

"Master Everard," he said suddenly, as he again came to a halt before me, "are you ready to undertake another affair for me?"

"That depends, Sir, on what the affair is," I replied guardedly; for I had no intention of mixing myself up in any of his disgraceful amours; and I suspected, after what he had said of the lady, it was something after this kind for which he desired my services.

The King flushed in anger; then, after a moment, in which my eyes were on his own, he burst into laughter.

"Upon my soul, Everard, I never have met the like of you before. I know of no other man that dare to speak to me as you do. Your bluntness takes one's breath away, and yet," he added, still laughing, "the manner is mighty becoming, and I can't help liking it in you; though at first 'tis a bit shocking."

I made no comment, and the King went on:

"Well, then, the matter that I wish you to take in hand is the arrest of this Sir Alfred Heron, whose sword you already have captured. 'Tis to be hoped he may be as successfully taken. Do you consent?"

I could see no reason for refusing. In fact I was most curious to unravel the little mysteries connected with this affair. I readily consented.

"His arrest, as you can understand, must be most secret. I merely wish him to be prevented from

leaving his estate at present. I shall place whatever number of men you wish at your disposal. You shall need at least a half dozen, besides your great Toby." Here the King smiled as he thought of the little swordsman. "I shall send you further instructions when I hear that you have laid hands on your prisoner."

"Shall I report to your Majesty here?"

"Yes, for the remainder of this week. The Court will leave Whitehall for Dover next week. If I hear not from you before I leave, I shall send you directions as to what you are to do with Sir Alfred."

"Where shall I seek my prisoner, Sir?"

"His estate is in Kent, not far from Canterbury. I shall send with you an officer that knows the way."

"How soon shall we set out, Sir?"

"How soon can you be ready?"

"Within the hour, Sir."

"Then within the hour you shall set out. No time may be spared. If Sir Alfred should learn that his treachery has been discovered, I believe he will take at once to flight. If he be allowed time in which to leave his home, you are like to have difficulty in capturing him. And captured he must be. 'Od's fish! I will turn England upside down, but he shall not escape!" And he struck his clenched fist into his other palm, by way of emphasis.

I was not surprised that his Majesty's temper was roused, for, to tell the truth, the abduction of

a lady from the Court was a most monstrous daring enterprise. Yet, behind all this cause that he had for wrath—and I think there is none that will not admit it was sufficient—I thought I saw another reason for his determination to prevent this Sir Alfred's escape. 'Tis possible it was my knowledge of the King's failings that caused me to look for other than most apparent causes for this thirst for revenge. I could not help feeling a sort of mischievous delight because this Mistress Heron had succeeded in making her escape from this place, which evidently was not to her liking. Heaven knows I had no love for women ; yet my sympathies ever have been with the weaker side, providing, of course, that the weaker side be possessed of some kind of virtue. In this case the King undoubtedly was the stronger. And as for virtue —well, his absolute ignorance of what that word meant was his only excuse for not possessing the quality.

"I shall send you a warrant by the officer that I shall place under your command," he said, after a few more turns about the room, which exercise seemed to have a soothing effect upon his anger.

I bowed and started to withdraw.

"Ah! I had forgot ; I am your debtor. You shall doubtless need money. I know how mighty inconvenient 'tis to be without it. Zooks! I would that I could gain it as easily as do you, Master Everard. You have but to fight for a living. I

must both fight and beg for mine." And he made a grimace, and laughed good-naturedly. "You shall have what I owe you, Everard. I'll send you a purse by the officer." He nodded smilingly, turned with a sigh, and strolled leisurely across the room to a door in the opposite wall, while I bowed deeply to his back and withdrew.

Zooks! but this Charles was an odd mixture—for a king.

CHAPTER III.

An hour after I left Whitehall an officer and six men rode into the court-yard of the inn at which I was staying. The officer hastily dismounted and advanced to where I had been standing for some moments, awaiting his arrival.

"Have I the honour to address Master Everard, Sir?" he asked.

"That is my name, Sir," I answered, advancing my hand for the weighty looking document that he held toward me.

As I glanced hurriedly over the parchment—which was my warrant for the arrest of one Sir Alfred Heron—the young gentleman explained briefly that he was Sir Charles Rawley, Bart., a lieutenant in the King's guards, with orders from the King to place himself and his men under my command for special service; all of which (with the exception of the fact that he was Sir Charles Rawley, Bart., a person with a monstrous opinion of his own importance) I knew before. He then drew forth a purse of gold, which he handed to me with the words: "With the compliments of his Majesty the King."

I called Toby and gave the order to set out at once.

In ten minutes we rode forth from the inn; in ten more we were crossing the bridge, and within three quarters of an hour after receiving the King's warrant we had left the city far behind.

Thanks to the weather the road was good, so we made fast time, having put something more than fifteen miles between London and us by one o'clock, when we halted at a wayside inn for our midday meal. We rested here but an hour, and then proceeded at the same round pace, for I was determined to reach the house of Sir Alfred before nightfall.

Sir Charles proved to be a better companion than I had at first thought him, being free of conversation—that is, if the answering of questions may be called conversation. I could see from his manner, however, that he felt himself in no way honoured by being placed under my command, though, to do the boy justice, he tried mightily to keep from showing it. Had I been ten years younger this might have caused me annoyance, but having brushed shoulders with so many and so various animals I found it more amusing than otherwise, and would now and again indulge in some petty familiarity, merely for the diversion of watching his hidden resentment. Think not from this that I was born with an even temper. On the contrary, the devil supplied me with an abundance of fire. But I never was one that sought a quarrel (though I never have avoided one), and though there are many

to whom my manner is irritating, I am slow to fall out with them for that reason. To this boy I was but a swaggering adventurer, a fighter of duels, a brawler at inns, who was now on a service in keeping with my reputation; while he was a gentleman born and bred, to whom it was but scant honour to be engaged in such an enterprise. He was right. 'Twas amusing, upon my soul! But he—like many another—did not know Mark Everard.

But as the afternoon wore on I began gradually to form another opinion of the young officer. Becoming less frozen under the warmth of my apparently confiding and careless manner, he—perhaps unconsciously—grew more familiar. He began by asking me of affairs in France, having previously learned from my conversation that I had been returned from there but a few days; then England became the subject—England in general—then the Court, the King, the Queen, and finally he mentioned a thing of no less importance than the King's presence at the May-pole dance the night before. It was at this point that my opinion of the young gentleman underwent the change. Was it possible that this boy, this stripling, was attempting to draw me out? 'Twas absurd! Yet, how knew he of the King's presence at the dance? Might there not be something in this young man that I had not looked for? Most assuredly I had every reason to be on my guard. Did not I suspect the

young Duke of Monmouth of being connected with the abduction plot? Well, then, if the affair was of sufficient importance for his Grace to mix himself up in and take such monstrous risks, was it not to be expected that a person who had played so important a part in the affair as had one Mark Everard would be worth keeping an eye on? It suddenly occurred to me, as I asked myself these questions, that this Sir Charles Rawley was not all that I had thought him—or, rather, he was more, much more.

I did not let my companion see that my suspicions were aroused, but, on the contrary, discussed the matter freely with him.

"Does his Majesty make a practice of attending such merry-makings?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, though for some time past he has gone most secretly."

"And was he used to go more openly, then?" I asked in apparent surprise. I was setting a trap for Sir Charles.

"Yes, he has been more careful since—some time since—the Queen, who accompanied him, was left alone, sitting in her chair, and managed to reach the Palace only with great difficulty and danger. Some there were that spoke of a plot to have her Majesty abducted, and that she was left thus alone that the abductors might the more easily succeed. Of course 'twas absurd," he added with a depreciating shrug. "But when this story got abroad

his Majesty's ministers advised him to discontinue the practice."

"And how long is it since this amusing incident occurred?" I smiled.

"'Tis some two years since. 'Twas before my time at Court. Since then, until last night, the Que——" He broke off abruptly and turned scarlet to the roots of his hair.

I spurred my horse sharply on the side farther from Sir Charles, and as the beast pranced and sidled angrily under my tight rein, I swore roundly at him, that the young gentleman might labour under the delusion that I had not noted his *lapsus linguæ*.

"Your pardon, Sir," I said, when my mount again walked quietly: "I did not hear your last remark."

"Ah! yes; 'twas about his Majesty, I think. I said he has been more careful as to where the Queen goes since that night. Her Majesty is not now permitted to indulge in such romantic frolics. For that *was* romantic; was it not?" He laughed uneasily.

"Yes, indeed," I replied, and started on at a gallop.

I had made a discovery. My companion knew of the Queen's presence at the dance of the previous night. Besides this, he did not wish me to know of his knowledge, else he would not have checked himself so confusedly when he saw he was telling

too much. Was there no end to the number of the conspirators? Yet, when I came to think of it—as I did to the accompaniment of the horses' hoofs beating upon the hard road, the clank of scabbards, the jingle of spurs, as we dashed ahead—'twas quite to be expected that they—the conspirators—would have some one sent with me that would keep them informed as to my success—or lack of it. If Monmouth, or any one else of power, was in their ranks 'twas no trouble to have one of their trusted men chosen as the officer to accompany me. Well, they had sent one that was not over deep, and I had partly found him out, so I felt no great uneasiness for the present. I should keep a close watch on the Baronet and try to find out what were his plans before he should have an opportunity of carrying them to a point where they might seriously interfere with mine. It was quite likely, though, that his men were of his own colour, and doubtless they were thoroughly posted as to the part each was to play. Seven against two! If the plotters were determined to carry their designs out boldly, Toby and I seemed destined to find ourselves in a most interesting situation. Zooks! 'twould not be the first time for us to find ourselves in such circumstances. But now, as I thought of this young man's attempting to outwit so old a hand as was I, I must confess the situation struck me as somewhat new. Yes, it was original; and then, as I thought on it the more, it seemed almost laughable. I

turned to glance at Sir Charles; he was watching me with a troubled look upon his boyish features. That was the climax; I had to turn my face away and spur my horse, that he might not see me burst out laughing.

By this time the sun was sinking low. In another hour he would be gone for the night. There was no time for more talk. Sir Alfred's home must be reached in that hour; and our horses were weary, and Sir Charles informed me that we were yet some eight or ten miles from our destination. There was no drawing of reins, but the spur soon was plied freely, and a neck was clapped encouragingly, and an oath was rolled out roughly, when an uncertain step was made. Our party soon became less compact, the weaker beasts, or those that bore the greatest weights, gradually dropping behind.

"We turn here, Sir," called out Sir Charles, as we drew near a road leading to the right.

"How much farther?" I panted, as we halted at the corner, that we might permit the stragglers to overtake us.

"But one league more, Sir; and the sun is still twenty minutes from the earth," he answered, as he followed my example of using the hat as a fan.

The roads were dry, and we were a sorry sight, covered as we were with dust from head to foot.

Then on we went at a painful gallop for two miles more, the horses' heads wobbling wearily; then a trot became our fastest pace, and with our followers

again strung far out behind, we came at last to the gates of Heron Hall just as the sun's rim disappeared behind the wooded horizon.

I pulled at the bell-chain, shook the iron gate vigorously and shouted several times, ere I succeeded in getting the porter from his lodge. Presently, however, he came to the other side of the gate and looked through at us stupidly, asking no questions, nor making any move to admit us.

"Come, my man, open quickly. Zounds! 'tis not you we have come to see," I snapped, annoyed by his sullen stare.

"Who are you?" he growled, without moving a muscle.

"The devil! What is that to you? Open that gate at once, sirrah, or I'll wear out my scabbard upon your back when I do get in!"

"When you do get in,!" he repeated with a shrug of his shoulders, and turned to walk away.

"Halt!" I shouted, drawing a pistol and taking aim through the bars of the gate. "Come back here and open this gate, or you'll never open another!"

He stopped and looked back, scowling. "There would be no one to open it for you at all if you killed me," he replied deliberately.

"Zooks! you should be as useful to me dead as you are living."

"No, I wouldn't," he contradicted in the same dull tones.

"Why?" I questioned, studying the strange

creature. 'Twas evident this fellow could not be frightened. He spoke the truth; 'twould do me no good to kill him, and although it looked as if he would be of but little use to me living, yet 'tis seldom that a quick man is not better than a dead. And besides all this, I am no assassin, and had no thought of shooting him.

"Because, if you will wait, I'll ask the master if you're to be admitted." And not waiting my reply, he started slowly up the winding drive toward the house.

I heard a gruff oath behind me, and turned in time to see Toby shaking his fist at the disappearing porter.

"He's just trying to gain time, Sir," said the little man angrily. "I'd like to know what's going on up at the house, Sir."

"Zooks! I believe you are right. Is there another entrance to the park, Sir Charles?"

"'Od's fish! yes, Sir," he answered with a start. "It's on the other side, almost opposite this one."

"Then while we wait here they may be making their escape. 'Tis as you say, Toby; the porter is gaining time. Quick! hold my rein. That gate must be opened."

I sprang to the ground and, warning my companions to keep well back, placed my pistol to the great lock and fired. There was a sharp report, a ringing in my ears, and a tingling sensation in the fingers; but the gates remained locked together, in

spite of the vigorous shaking I gave them to test the effect of the shot. I hastened back to my saddle and got my other pistol. This time there must be no failure. Every moment given to Sir Alfred robbed me of a chance of capturing him. I did not believe he had left; for if he had, the porter would not have acted so strangely. A weary ride of over forty miles, and then have our game escape us just as we arrived at the gate! No, no; the lock must burst this time. I put my whole will into the shot. It could not fail. I aimed the pistol at an angle, so that it pointed in the direction in which the bolt should go. Very carefully I fired, that I might not displace the muzzle. A crash!—the pistol flew out of my hands; burnt powder blew into my face; I gave the gates a shake, then another, and at the third attempt they swung slowly open. 'Twas fortunate they were not barred, or we should have been forced to abandon our horses, climb the wall, and make our way to the house on foot, which would have consumed much time, and would have left us in a position in which we should have been unable to pursue the fugitives in case they already should have left.

"Quick, Toby, my horse!" I called, snatching up the pistol I had dropped.

In a moment he was at my side. I sprang into the saddle, clapped spurs to the poor beast's tender sides, and galloped up the drive with all possible speed, my companions at my heels. This drive was,

as I have said, winding; but this condition lasted only a little way; for when we had thundered across a bridge the path divided, one branch running to the left, the other to the right, both circling round a series of terraces, upon the topmost of which a stately mansion stood. We took the right, dashing ahead along the circling, ever-rising drive. Now we could see the whole front and left wing of the house. . . . Still no sign of life.

"This way!" I cried, and swung to the right, that we might make a complete circle around the place. Down the left wing we went, past little casements and great bow windows, turned to the left again, round the corner and—almost crashed against a coach, into which a man of about fifty was hastily handing a lady. The driver already was in his seat, and two mounted and armed men stood by the rear wheels.

Instantly confusion reigned. The guards—they were the chairmen of the night before—drew their pistols and faced us boldly. The coachman, in his excitement forgetting that his master was not yet in the coach, lashed his horses and started off, almost throwing the gentleman to the earth.

"Quick, Toby, the carriage!" I cried. But he had not waited for his cue. He was off the moment the coach had started. The guards levelled their pistols and shouted to him to halt. He gave a whoop and rode still faster. Now he was directly in front of them. Shots rang out, but Toby rode on

unharmed. At the moment of their fire he had thrown himself upon his horse's neck; the bullets passed harmlessly over his back; and before the guards could recover from their surprise he was past them, was beside the running coach-horses and reaching for their reins. The crowd of servants in the background (at their head stood the surly porter), myself and my followers thought of nothing but the exciting race between my little friend and the coachman. Several fruitless attempts Toby made to seize the leader's bit. . . . Then at last he had it—and a cheer went up from seven parched throats. . . . Sir Charles was silent.

"In the King's name, put up your weapons," I commanded, turning to Sir Alfred's men.

They hesitated, looked nervously at their master, but slowly lowered the points of their pistols.

"Put up your arms, my men," Sir Alfred said quietly. "We are not attacked by robbers, as you have good excuse to think. That these gentlemen feared to miss me is doubtless the reason for their so startling appearance. Ah! Sir Charles Rawley, as I live!" he cried with seeming surprise and an attempt at pleasure. "'Tis fortunate you arrived when you did; I was about to set out for the house of a friend, there to spend the night." And he uncovered and flourished his hat after the most approved fashion.

The growing darkness partially concealed the

young officer's embarrassment, as he made answer to this greeting.

The coach now was drawing near, Toby riding at the horses' heads and leading them slowly.

I dismounted and approached Sir Alfred.

"And you, Sir?" said he, facing me haughtily, his eyebrows raised in what was meant to be most withering surprise, "I think I have not had the honour of meeting you before."

"For which I crave your pardon, Sir. 'Tis no fault of mine, I assure you. I did my best, Sir, but I tripped on that confounded corpse, you see, and before I could rise we had become separated." And with my gauntlet I flicked the dust from my boot-tops.

He started as though I had dealt him a blow. For a moment he stood silent, then he seemed to pull himself together, as though to face the matter out boldly. "And what is your errand here, Sir?" he snapped.

"I come from the King, who wishes to thank you for the present you made him."

"Present?" he puzzled.

"Your sword," I smiled.

Sir Alfred started. "Is that all?" he asked coldly.

"And I came also to see that you do not commit the indiscretion that I am just in time to prevent—namely, your going abroad. The King fears for your health, Sir, and has sent me to you that you

may not lack companionship during your indisposition. Until your physician—the King—shall direct otherwise, you must not, under any circumstances, endanger your life by leaving your estate."

"Cease your buffoonery, Sir! Do you mean to say that I am under arrest?"

"'Tis a rough way of putting it, for that's what we say of thieves; but if it's more to your liking, why, then, we will so name it."

"Doubtless you have a warrant?"

"Doubtless, Sir."

"Mayhap you will be kind enough to permit me to see it?"

"I will, Sir, provided you take me to a light."

He seemed not inclined to ask me to enter the house, for he sent a servant for a lanthorn. When this was come I held the warrant whilst he with trembling finger traced along each line.

"And my daughter?" he gasped, when he had done. "My God! is England come to be worse than France?"

"Hush, Sir," I said softly in his ear, holding the document between my face and Sir Charles; "be careful what words you use; they may be brought to face you."

He turned and eyed me in wonder, his expression showing half suspicion and half confidence.

"Give me your word of honour as a gentleman and a soldier that neither you nor your daughter will leave your house without first warning me, and

I will see to it that you shall not be put to greater inconvenience than is necessary," I went on in the same low tone.

"Why do you speak thus, as though you were my friend, though 'tis but a moment since you insulted me?" he asked quietly.

"Because I have a mystery to unravel; not for any kindly feeling I bear you. What do you say? Are my terms acceptable?"

"What if I should decline?"

"You and your daughter shall be placed under guard night and day."

"Then I accept."

"I also give you this advice. Do not under any circumstances place the smallest trust in your acquaintance, Sir Charles Rawley, yonder."

Sir Alfred gave me a lightning glance from the corner of his eye.

"You think he can be trusted because of what he knows of this matter." I was trying a chance shot. It struck home. Sir Alfred stared at me in wonder.

"Remember what I have said. I have asked no questions. I merely have put you on your guard. I repeat: 'tis from no liking I bear you; but I now am assured that there is more in this whole affair than some of the principals think."

"What is it, father?" asked a soft, sweet voice beside us.

I felt inclined to tell a lie, as I turned and saw her noble form and face softly outlined in the

lanthorn light, her eyes wide with anxiety, her lips apart in fear; but her father prevented me. He knew his daughter's nature well.

"We are now under arrest, my dear, by order of the King. I have given my word to Master Everard, here, that neither you nor I will make any attempt to leave our house without first warning him."

The maiden turned to me, her eyes flashing with indignation, her lip curled in scorn; but he put his hand upon her arm.

"Hush, Virginia; give this gentleman no insult. 'Tis by his courtesy we are not placed under guard. He is but doing his duty."

"And is it because I——?"

"Silence, Virginia! 'Tis by the King's command."

CHAPTER IV.

HAVING retired an hour after supper on the night of my arrival at Heron Hall, I was refreshed sufficiently to be stirring by sunrise next morning.

The ever-awake Toby knocked at my door almost at the moment my foot touched the floor.

"Are we the first to be risen?" I asked, as I admitted him.

"The servants have been about for some little time, Sir. But they're doing nothing but humming like a swarm of bees. One would think I was the Devil himself, from the way they have watched me. We'll be mighty lucky if we get any breakfast this morning, Sir; they're so excited and frightened by our coming that 'twill take them until noon at least to get down to work."

"So much the better, Toby; their delay will give us time to take a look about the place. 'Tis necessary that we become familiar with it, for who knows that we shall not have need of our knowledge before we leave? And besides, Toby, I think it well that we should have a confidential talk."

Toby said nothing. He cocked his head and gave me a sharp, quick glance from the corner of his eye, then smiled gently, and held the door wide while I went out.

As we passed the right front corner of the mansion, on our way to a winding path bordered with fresh green and fantastically-trimmed bushes, we suddenly came upon the fellow that had refused us admission at the gates the night before. For that I bore him no malice. No, not for that; but he had a face that made me hate him, though for why I could not tell. 'Twas not over ugly, but there was an expression in his dead black eyes that reminded me of a drowsy snake, and prompted me to crush him. There was nothing spiteful nor bold in his look, but it seemed to possess a kind of dead deviltry, as though a fiend reposed behind a masque of lifeless flesh. His movements were slow and awkward, and his expression never changed from its natural scowl. Though I almost knocked against him, he neither paused nor started, but merely turned his bloodless face toward me and passed on, without even altering his course.

"Zounds! my fine fellow, you are possessed of an abundance of impudence and ill manners. Know you not that you should stand aside while a gentleman passes, and not thrust yourself thus rudely across his path?" I demanded.

"Ay, I do," he replied slowly, as he came to a halt and turned but half toward me.

"Then remember to do it in future. And hark!" I called, as he turned again to go. "Whenever you have occasion to speak to me again, add Sir to what you may have to say. I may find it necessary to

give more lessons in manners before I leave here."

As I spoke the last word he started off down the circling drive toward the gate.

"'Twould give me rare pleasure to toast that lizard on a sword-point," Toby growled, as he stepped into the path.

"It looks as though we are to have our hands full ere we shall have finished this business, Toby. What think you of the men the King has sent to assist us?"

"I found out that they have all served under the Little Duke, Sir, Sir Charles with the rest."

"Ho! ho! Worse than I had thought, though not much. I discovered yesterday that Sir Charles is in the plot. Something tells me this Sir Alfred is the dupe of more daring conspirators. If I could but get a clue as to what their real plans are, we might have a good chance to defeat them. Until we do get that information, Toby, my man, we are fighting in the dark. Yes, I hate mightily to admit it, but I see no key yet."

"Well, Sir, I just got a sight of it now, and in a minute you'll see it too, Sir." He chuckled softly.

Was it possible Toby was jesting? I never had known him to make light of a serious matter before. And where was this key to the situation, of which he spoke so knowingly? I confess I was on the verge of being annoyed somewhat, as I asked him

what the key was, which he so suddenly had discovered, and which had escaped my eyes.

The little man put his finger to his lip, held his left hand upon his hilt, and keeping as close to the side of the path as possible, he tiptoed along, beckoning me to follow. For a half-score paces we went thus, then he craned his neck carefully, as he leaned far out and glanced round a gentle bend. "There it is, Sir, or I don't know my sword from a soup-ladle," he whispered.

I followed his example, and leaned round the corner cautiously. For a moment I stared with open mouth, then retreated a pace and faced my servant, whose eyes were dancing with amusement. His mustaches were twirled in satisfaction.

"So you think that is the key?" I asked, half-smiling. "Are you sure it is not something of more importance? Don't you think the real plot is at Whitehall?"

"Yes, Sir, I think the real plot is at Whitehall, but I think most of the work will be done here."

"And how about the Queen?"

"She has played her part, Sir, I think."

This seemed of sufficient weight to warrant me in giving a few pulls at my upper lip. Toby had made a good point. He almost had changed my opinion as to the plans of the conspirators. I knew from experience that Toby could see through a tolerably thick fog; therefore his opinion was of importance. True, 'twas worthy of deep consideration, yet I did

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not feel safe in accepting it as final. A few days more would decide definitely whether the chief action in this comedy (or tragedy) should take place at Whitehall or Heron Hall. Truth to tell, my own opinion began to take the same form as Toby's, but I would not decide positively until I should have sent my messenger to the King—and received a reply.

Again I peeped carefully around the corner. She was standing upon the farther end of a little rustic bridge, not more than twenty paces distant. She was robed in white, and stood statue-like in the broken morning sunbeams glancing through the leaves. In one hand she held a bunch of flowers, with the other she leaned upon the rough cedar railing at the bridge-side. She had no thought of our presence, as she gazed sadly down into the clear waters at her feet. As we looked she raised her head slowly, pressed her handkerchief to her eyes, then resumed her former attitude, staring at the brook.

I stepped back behind the bushes, Toby following my example. Our eyes met. His face wore an expression I seldom had seen it have before. His colour was heightened, and when he caught my eye, 'Slife! he did nothing less surprising than drop his lids, as though in shame. True, he tried for a moment to bluster it off, for carefully he pulled up one boot-top and then the other, as though their position was of the greatest consequence. Then he gave a

great twist at his mustaches, but for some unaccountable reason even it seemed to droop instead of bristle. I must confess I had something of the same lack of ease, myself. I know not if I showed it, but—well—I didn't feel proud of myself—no, not a jot. Nor was Toby's look inclined to stimulate my self-respect. Here was an old soldier, who for years had been accustomed to share in all manner of harsh undertakings, ashamed of his part in the hunting down and handing over to her persecutors of a poor defenceless maiden. Faith! the affair had no pleasing aspect, if my orders were to be carried out. A half-score of men, backed by the King's commands, engaged in the courageous undertaking of capturing a maiden of twenty summers! Held in that light, 'tis no wonder we both blushed. But as I reconsidered the situation I thought less poorly of myself. If I had refused the commission, some one else would have taken it up. In that case the position of the lady would have been no better—doubtless worse, for now, before she should be handed over to the King—or anyone else—I should have full knowledge of the plot centred at Whitehall, and would have a good care that my servant should not have occasion again to blush for his master. I decided that he was deserving of a pat upon the back, which I at once administered.

"Toby, my man," I smiled, "you have misjudged me. But I am glad of it, for now I have discovered of what stuff you are made. You think we have

fallen somewhat because we are instruments in the persecution of this poor lady." (The little man fidgeted uneasily.) "But there, Toby, is where you wrong me. I admit I fell somewhat in my own estimation when it occurred to me that we were the persecutors. But we are not, Toby; no, I'll see the King and all in hell before I'll take up the work of catching mistresses for him! But remember this also: there are these plots to unravel. If I find that this lady is the innocent victim of those knaves at Whitehall, she shall not be handed over to the King. But remember, my man, we have a most difficult part to play. I took up the King's commission, not for gold this time, but because I thought we were the only two men in England capable of seeing fair play. I have not over-estimated our task; we shall have work yet in this affair as difficult as any we ever have had, or I have not read the signs aright. Watch night and day, Toby, and remember, you never shall have cause to blush for your master, so long as that master is Mark Everard."

"Oh, Sir, it wasn't that," he stammered. "Don't think that of me, Sir! I—I didn't like to see you mixed up with a woman; that was all, Sir. You know this is the first time we have had to catch a—*young* woman,—and I,—well, Sir, you know how these kings soon make devils of them, Sir—even of the best of them, Sir. You know we've always somehow kept out of such scrapes—and I—well, I thought it might bring—bring—bad luck, if we

started in now. Besides, Sir, she doesn't look as though she ought to be mixed up in this kind of thing,—does she?"

By this time he had almost annihilated a tender shrub that grew by the path, by pulling a sprout from it as he started each sentence.

"Why, that's exactly what I say, my friend," I said kindly, putting my hand upon his shoulder. "I meant not to hurt your feelings, Toby. The same thought occurred to me as did to you. Come, we understand the situation, and ourselves, better than we did. Think no more of what we each have said; we shall require all our time in the successful carrying out of our plans. And now, if you will return to the house and learn at what hour breakfast will be prepared, I shall await you at—ah, say, the little bridge yonder."

"Very well, Sir," he replied, in his accustomed short, quick way;—but his face wore an anxious expression as he started back toward the house.

"So little Toby has a heart, has he, with all his gruffness and savage visage," I mused, as I stood and watched his retreating figure. "True, I always have known that he would die for me, but I never dreamed that he could be troubled with sentiment like this. And yet, when he first spied her on the bridge he laughed, as though her capture was amusing. Strange! It must have been her weeping! Bah! tears are the cause of more mistakes than wine. Toby, Toby, my boy, you must stop such

nonsense. Zounds! if this tenderness of heart should become a permanent affliction with you, I should be turned into a housewife, my cloak changed for a shawl, and my hand, made hard by years of swordsmanship, should then be softened, so to stitch with silk. No, Toby; a heart is a mighty bad thing for our business. You must kill it, Toby; it never will do." And so, grumbling, I strolled down to the little bridge.

So occupied was I with these thoughts that I did not raise my eyes from the path until I stepped upon the bridge, and then 'twas with a start, as I remembered Mistress Heron. Great was my surprise to find that she had gone. I stood alone on the rustic structure; the maiden had disappeared. Nor could she be seen along the path on the other side. "She must have gone while Toby and I were talking," I thought, leaning upon the slender railing, and peering into the little brook. "She must be warned against this wandering alone through the park, for who can tell if this Sir Charles would not dare to have her disappear? It could easily be done, and the blame would rest on me. You must stop your strolling, Mistress Heron, or I shall be compelled to lock you up, or send Toby with you on your walks." I moved a few paces farther, following the movements of a fair-sized fish, which glided cautiously along near the bottom of the stream, his nose pointing to the sand, his head turned to one side, as though he sought for worms. Be-

hind him went a score of little ones, following their leader's every move. If he turned his head to the right, they immediately followed his lead ; if to the left, the same ; and even when he nibbled at a bit of rock—confound the little idiots!—but they did likewise.

"Whitehall!" I laughed. There goes the King, indolent as the devil, yet nibbling at everything ; and after him the Court, made up of smaller fish, apeing his every act. Gad! Heron Hall is well up in the fashion ; even the fishes follow the example of the martyr's son."

"Ha! what is this? Crumbs, eh! So that is the attraction that has drawn the little Court. So, so, Mistress Heron, this is what brought you to the rustic bridge so early. You encourage this royal pomp and luxury. Have a care, have a care, Madam, that you become not a crumb yourself, a crumb for that of which this is a miniature reproduction. I admit, 'tis a pretty toy, but the principle is dangerous, most dangerous, for one in your circumstances."

The King and his Court darted under the bridge. "Some new attraction, eh!" I stepped to the other side, leaned over—started and stared, feeling mighty foolish the while ; for there stood the lady herself, upon a broad stone that formed a platform at the water's edge. She was turned partly from me, as though caught in the act of making her escape. She was motionless, however, when I saw her, as though resolved to show no sign of fear. Fright-

ened she was, though, beyond a doubt, for her attitude belied her look of fearless indignation.

Like a flash, everything that I had said whilst on the bridge ran through my mind, and made me think I must have shouted it.

"I wonder how much she heard?" I worried. "Every word, I am positive," answered some malicious devil within me. "Come, be a man, and face it boldly out," I whispered to my resolution; and with a smile that a leech might well have treated, I raised my hat and made an awkward bow.

For a moment she stood irresolute. Then she faced me savagely, her hands clenched tightly and her toe beating quickly upon the stone. Her head she held high, which told me she was still most heartily afraid, no matter what brave words she might use. As to what the words would be, I was not left long in doubt.

"So, Sir, 'tis not enough that you should take possession of our home and turn it into a barrack for your men, but you must needs come spying upon your prisoner, insulting her with your loud-spoken soliloquies. Why do you stand watching me? Do you fear I shall break my father's parole? Have I not had enough of injury? Will not you leave me?" She stamped her foot like a deer at bay.

"But, Madam, I swear——"

"Yes, Sir, I have heard you," she interrupted, and turned her back to me.

"Zooks! the little savage!" I winced. "And

she has wit too." I smiled at the way she had cut short my protestations. The smile brought with it a return of confidence. 'Twould never do to permit a woman to worst me. True, my knowledge of the sex was limited, for I never had considered them of sufficient importance to give their peculiarities minute attention. This one, however, seemed different from others of her kind. She seemed worthy of consideration. I now should give her some fatherly advice,—if she would let me speak without interruption. It was necessary to manage her cautiously, of that I was now convinced. She was an unbroken colt, with a mighty bad temper. Gentleness would do more than spur.

I started toward her end of the bridge.

"Stop, Sir!"

I stopped.

"Don't come near me! Go back the other way!" Again she was the indignant goddess.

Now my resolutions were good, and I fully had resolved to put up with her whims until I should get an opportunity to warn her against the habit of frequenting these comparatively solitary places; but there always has been something in my nature that seems never to agree with direct orders. In this case, her orders and this "something" had difficulty at their first meeting, the result of which was, that I had to settle the matter by a compromise, which brought me to a halt, but did not turn me back.

"Madam," I protested, again leaning upon the railing, "I crave your pardon, but you do me wrong."

She raised her eyebrows, as though the matter were of but little consequence.

"I had no such base intent as you think, when I came to this spot. 'Twas chance, purely, that brought me here. I knew not of your presence."

"You know now, Sir, and yet you seem not inclined to respect my wishes."

"You will not permit me to explain."

"I have heard your explanation."

"But now I wish to give you some advice." My temper here began to exercise an influence.

"I have a father to whom I look for guidance."

"Ay, and thanks to his advice you find yourself in your present perilous circumstances."

"I bow to your wisdom, Sir, which shows itself in the prudence you display in saying those words to me, not to my father."

I swore softly to myself.

"This, then, is my advice, Madam—yea, I must make it a command, since you will not heed it otherwise: These walks through the park, without protection, must cease. There is danger in it. Your peril now is great enough; but every time you come to these places you increase your danger twofold."

"How can I be in danger when so securely guarded?" she sneered.

"'Twere more suitable, I think, Madam, to treat

them that wish you well with less scorn and more consideration."

"I thank you, Sir; but when I meet my friends I shall know how to treat them."

"You doubtless have reason to regard me with suspicion, because of the office I now fill. But I warn you, before many days shall have passed you may have to rely on the sword of Mark Everard as your only salvation. I may mistake, but, verily, I believe what I say will prove true. The odds will be greatly against me. Desperate measures may have to be resorted to. I have nothing to gain by taking up this matter. I may fail. But whether I shall be successful or not, I think you then will find no fault with the advice I have given you this morning."

Her head gradually bent while I spoke, and when I had finished, she glanced up cautiously, her head held to one side. I could see she had difficulty in understanding my words, for her look showed half belief and half suspicion. She said nothing for several moments, but I did not think it well to add to what I already had told her. Presently she stooped and picked a fragment of bread from the stone platform, where doubtless it had fallen when I startled her. She stepped slowly to the water's edge and started to break the bread into particles and to scatter them upon the surface, where instantly they were seized by hungry little mouths and borne below.

I stood still, idly drumming my fingers upon the railing, and wondering what next to expect from this erratic prisoner, who treated her poor captor with so little respect.

"There, do you see that large one?" she smiled, turning up one side of her face. "I call him Julius, because he looks so much like our porter. It was Julius that wouldn't let you in, last night," she explained.

Was ever anything more difficult to comprehend? Under the circumstances, one would think a fish the last thing to which her thoughts would turn. But that, I suppose, is the very reason why I should not have been surprised.

I stood undecided for a moment, half-frowning, half-smiling, and then, remembering my determination to humour her, and not being able to see this worthy fish from where I stood,—well, I went down to the stone platform—grumbling to myself the while—and tried to get a peep at the little Julius.

"Oh! now you have frightened him away!" she reproached. "'Twas the noise of those spurs," she added, pointing to the offending decorations.

She seemed more concerned about the flight of the fish than she had been when I told her of her danger.

"Now keep very still," she cautioned, her annoyance passing as quickly as it had come. "He is timid with strangers, and may require some coaxing, before he will return."

I did as directed, while she broke more crumbs and dropped them carefully, one by one, into the water. 'Twas the first time I stood on the same level beside her, in the daylight, and I now had an opportunity to notice that she was not tall, as I had thought her. My impression that she was tall must have been formed by comparison with the Queen, who was much below the middle height; for now, as she stood dropping the crumbs, I could see she was little, if any, above the middle stature.

"There he is. Be careful not to frighten him. Is not the resemblance striking?" she smiled.

"'Tis the King," I murmured inaudibly. Then aloud I said: "There is a resemblance, I admit; but surely the real Julius should feel flattered by the comparison. The fish looks more pleasant, I think."

She laughed.

I picked up a bit of the bread and, breaking it into yet smaller particles, dropped them slowly into the water at the edge of the stone.

Julius came fearfully along, his head bent to one side, that he might keep his eye on me.

"Now the eyes of the two Juliuses are very similar, though I favour the expression in those of this one. The mouths of both seem to have a tendency to greater development, though apparently without reason. Both are blessed with the same complexion —olive, would you call it? But 'tis when we come to compare their movements that the fish has the greater

advantage. He is the embodiment of grace, whereas the other, I fear, is somewhat deficient in the quality. So you will see, when we sum up their respective points of merit, that this Julius has a considerable advantage."

"I fear you are not an impartial judge, Sir." She regarded me in half-amusement. "You bear malice against the human Julius because he refused you admittance. That is not right, or, at least, 'tis not strictly judicial."

"Oh, Madam, I protest!"

"Then why do you not consider his virtues before pronouncing judgment?"

"And is he possessed of virtues?"

"By that question you stand convicted; you confess that you have not looked for them. Virtues? Indeed he has many. Was it not a virtue to refuse to admit a band of armed strangers to the home of his master, even though they threatened his life? He would die for me, Sir."

"Oh! would he?" I thought. "Well, from the appearance of things he will not lack opportunity for long, I should judge. And I hope he will not permit it to pass him." Aloud I merely said: "But, Madam, we were comparing only their appearances, not merits."

"Ah! you have halted and are intrenching, Sir."

"The fruit of experience, Madam. I am an old soldier."

I had a few crumbs left and these I was in the

act of dropping to the little Julius and his followers, when I heard a gruff "Ahem!" Looking up I beheld Toby at the other side of the stream, leaning upon the end of the bridge-rail. His face was stern as ever, but his eyes were dancing with amusement. I dropped the remaining crumbs as though they had been coals of fire. "The little devil!" I swore inwardly. "Why could he not have whistled as he came, or made a jingle with his spurs? I must give Toby a lesson. To find me in this ridiculous position! —feeding fish, like a schoolboy!" I could have drowned the little rascal, if he had been beside me. Had it been any one but Toby, I should not have cared; but to have Toby, who thought all wisdom centred in me, find me playing with fishes, and talking nonsense to a maiden, when I should have been devising ways for the carrying out of my plans, was more than I could bear with any sense of comfort.

"Well, Toby, what is it?" I asked with as good a show of amiability as I could command.

"You told me to inform you when your breakfast was prepared, Sir. It is now ready, Sir." At this moment his eyes left mine and glanced quickly to some point behind and to one side of where we stood.

I turned and looked in the same direction, but saw only the path, the trees and bushes; and when I faced Toby again, he was no longer gazing beyond me, but pulled at his mustaches and stared intently at the water.

"Is your servant as savage as he looks?" Mistress Heron asked, as we went up the three steps from the broad stone to the bridge.

"Nay, nay, Madam; fear him not; 'tis but his manner. There is no better heart in England." I had forgiven the little rascal already.

Toby advanced a pace to meet us, and as I passed he touched me lightly on the arm.

I asked pardon of the lady, and stopped with Toby at the end of the bridge, whilst she walked on without comment or apparent notice.

"Well, Toby?"

He raised his arm and pointed in the direction of the house, while in a low voice he said: "Don't look behind us, Sir; there's some one in the bushes a little way back of where you and the lady were standing when I came up."

"Could you make out the face or figure?" I asked, making a motion with my hands as though I were giving minute instructions.

"No, Sir," Toby answered, touching his hat, and bowing; "he was just drawing back among the bushes when I saw him. I could see nothing but his hat, Sir."

"Try to find out who he is. Report to me as soon as possible. Be careful, Toby. Don't put yourself in the way of a bullet; we can't afford to run any risks. Don't drive him to bay; merely get a good sight of him, that you may be able to identify him when next you see the knave."

"Very well, Sir." He started off, whistling gaily as he went. From his manner one would think he had no thought nor care; but he realised that the man that spied would not hesitate to use his pistol, did he think it advantageous to do so.

"So they are following me closely already," I muttered, as I hastened after the lady. "They are resolved to lose no time. True, there is the possibility of its being that accursed Julius; but I think it was not. If I could but tell what the result will be when I send my message to Whitehall, I then should have the game in my own hands. As it is, I'm helpless, yes, helpless. But that message shall go to-day, if I have to let Sir Charles himself take it. After that, 'twill not be long ere we all shall know what parts we each must play. The odds, I doubt not, will be long; but Gad! Toby and I will play our hands out, win or lose." Just then I turned the corner, and found myself but a few paces behind the stake in this exciting game. "Zounds! she's worth it," I thought. "Now if I were ten years——"

She heard my jingling step, turned, eyed me in cold surprise, and walked on with quickened step.

"Bah! No, she is too haughty," I concluded, and blushed for what I almost had said.

CHAPTER V.

"If I have to send Sir Charles himself." These words that I had spoken without meaning started ringing in my ears, as I slowly crossed the lawn on my way to the main entrance of the house. With every step I took they were repeated.

I came to an abrupt halt by the sun-dial.

"Why not send Sir Charles?" I asked myself. "What advantage is it to me to have him here? None. No, he is worse than useless; he is a constant menace; and if he were absent, his men would be without a leader. But will he go? I wonder. Ha! there's the question. He might with safety refuse, being backed as he is by his seven men. Still, should he refuse, he knows that I should report him to the King, which might endanger the plans of his superiors; and that he dare not risk. I'll try him," I concluded. "Let him defy me, and I'll doff the silken glove and show a hand of steel."

Toby came quickly up the drive, whistling as when last I had seen him. He glanced carelessly in my direction, but passed on across the lawn toward the rear of the house without changing his course.

"Ho! Toby!" I called.

He halted, faced about, and came quickly toward me, smart and soldierly.

"Well, Toby?"

"Yes, Sir. Two of them. Two the oldest. They stood on the bridge and talked a little, then followed you up the path, Sir."

"Good! Good! See that they get no opportunity to speak privately with any of their comrades. Keep with them, Toby. I shall attend to Sir Charles."

"Yes, Sir."

"And, Toby," I said as he turned to go, "remember that you must above all things else avoid a quarrel."

"Yes, Sir." He hastened on toward the servants' quarters.

I chuckled softly, as I thought of my plan for ridding myself of embarrassment for a day at least.

"What could be more in contrast than this country paradise and the intrigue and treachery now going on within it?" I thought, as I cast my eye over the splendid mansion and its truly beautiful surroundings. "Trees and shrubs, drives, walks and streams, flowers and pure air; and through all the whistle of the robin and the hum of bees. Zooks! why did she ever go to Court? Who but a fool could here feel discontent? Still, mayhap 'tis better so," I added. And then with a quicker step started for breakfast.

In the main hall I met Sir Alfred and Sir Charles,

walking side by side. Both seemed embarrassed when they saw me; but I showed no surprise, and passed the time of day pleasantly. My manner seemed to reassure them; and together we entered the breakfast-room, Sir Alfred playing the host as freely as though not a prisoner.

"I sent to your room some little time since, Master Everard," he said, "that I might show you about the park, but found that you had forestalled me. However, if you will accompany me after breakfast, I think I yet can take you to some spots that will delight your eye. I have my favourite haunts, in which I spend much of my time when at home. We live simply here, Master Everard, as country people should, I think; for what is country life, if one must be tormented with a host of servants, strict city fashions, and the duties of a Court? Here each must entertain himself, and feel no slight; for every guest is also host."

"Indeed, Sir Alfred, 'twould be a difficult task for any but a most turbulent spirit to feel not at home in such a place of beauty. 'Tis difficult to understand why one that lives here ever could be tempted to desert it for the life of a Westminster or London."

His colour heightened, but with a smile he said: "One is not always master of one's circumstances, Sir, as you no doubt well know. Were I to gratify my inclinations, I should not leave my books, glasses and globes. But unlucky chance may be the cause

of placing us in positions in which we are forced to forego our greatest desires. These circumstances may not be denied, so, Zounds! we may as well smile as frown when we bow to them; and regret never yet has been known to change a fact." He laughed good-humouredly, as though his discomforts were amusing. Truly, either Sir Alfred had the instincts of the philosopher or he was a mighty good actor; at that moment I did not know which.

Sir Charles seemed to lack ease somewhat, and as I had thought enough to keep me occupied, our repast was finished without further conversation, except for an occasional word from Sir Alfred, who seemed bent on being cheerful, despite his uncomfortable situation.

As we left the table, I excused myself for not just then accepting of the kindness my prisoner had offered to show in taking me over the place, by explaining that I had some urgent affairs to transact with Sir Charles, which should not be delayed.

"Permit me not to interfere with your plans, Sir. Later I shall have the pleasure," he smiled, bowing as I turned to leave the room.

My eye fell upon a large mirror hanging beside the door, in which I caught a glimpse of him, glancing furtively, with eyebrows raised, in the direction of Sir Charles.

I took no apparent notice of this conduct, but passed out of the room with the young gentleman by my side, leaving my prisoner alone.

The situation seemed to wear a different, and not more pleasing, aspect with every moment that passed. Before breakfast I had come to the conclusion that Sir Alfred was an innocent dupe in the game. Now it was evident that I had fallen into an error not common to me—namely, the most dangerous mistake of arriving at conclusions without awaiting the proofs. That Sir Alfred could not be relied on was evident. Only the night before I had warned him to place no trust in Sir Charles, and, as an earnest of my honest intentions, had treated him with great consideration; and yet, here he was, at the first opportunity, conniving behind my back with the very man against whom I had warned him. "Of course there is the possibility of his playing double with Sir Charles, not me," I thought. "If he is a coward, he will doubtless think it good policy to let them that have been his fellow-conspirators think he is still of their number, even though in his heart he believes they have betrayed him," I argued. "Can a man that acts thus be trusted with his parole?" I worried.

At this moment we met a servant in the passage near my apartments. I stopped him and sent him for paper, pens and ink. I had decided. Sir Charles should go to London. Sir Alfred's double dealings should not alter my plans; for if they were plotting against me, 'twas better that they should be forty miles apart than together at my elbow. My prisoner might intend to act honourably with me; but that

I might think him honest, 'twas necessary to grant him a coward. I preferred to consider him a knave —a coward is so pitiable a thing.

I swung my door open and motioned Sir Charles to enter first. He seemed now to see for the first time that I suspected him, for he at once assumed a careless swagger, ever the manner of youth without great courage wishing to pass itself off as a careless dare-devil. He helped himself to a chair, without waiting an invitation, and throwing himself into it, swung his foot to and fro and stared at the ceiling.

That I might keep the boy in suspense as long as possible, I said nothing, and when the servant came with the writing materials, proceeded to write my report to the King without breaking the silence. He shifted in his seat uneasily, and cleared his throat at every pause I made. Doubtless he was preparing the speech with which he intended to refuse my orders—for by this time he must have known why I had brought him to my room. Had he remained still and not made his intentions so evident, he might have outwitted me; but as it was, he warned me of what to expect, so I was prepared. As I finished the brief report, which told shortly of how I had arrived at Heron Hall the previous night, and had placed Sir Alfred Heron under arrest, as commanded—omitting mention of his being caught in the attempt to escape—and informing his Majesty that I desired another officer to be sent me in place of Sir Charles Rawley—one

in whom one would place absolute trust—as bearer of the King's further commands, I called the lieutenant sharply.

It took him by surprise. "Yes, Sir," he replied smartly, springing to his feet with soldierly promptness.

"You are to start at once for Whitehall," I said, sealing the packet carefully in several places, using my signet ring with a great show of caution.

"But it is impossible——" he began, his foreplanned bluster coming to his rescue.

"Not at all, I assure you."

"Why, how——?"

"Upon your horse, to be sure. How else could you hope to travel?"

He grew more confused. "But I shall be needed here," he grumbled.

"Indeed I agree with you—I do need you here, but the King's commands may not be ignored."

"One of the men should be sent," he said, with his ludicrous swagger.

"Again I agree with you, but unfortunately the King has ordered otherwise."

"How—when?" he stammered.

"His Majesty commanded me to send a report to him, so soon as I had effected the capture of Sir Alfred, by the officer that he should send with me. You are the officer he sent, therefore you are the only person authorised to bear the despatch."

I rose and handed him the packet.

He put out his hand unwillingly, as though he feared the wax might burn him. His bluster was gone, but still he hesitated, searching for some last excuse, for all the world like a schoolboy trying to avoid his chastisement. "When shall I leave?" he asked presently.

"Why, Sir Charles, you seem dull of comprehension this morning. I already have said—at once."

"I have not my spurs, cloak, nor gauntlets," he sulked.

"Quite so; and you need them. I shall accompany you while you get them, Sir Charles."

He glanced at me hatefully, shrugged his shoulders and turned to the door.

"Oh! Sir Charles," I said, as we passed out, "there is one thing that I almost forgot to mention to you. 'Tis the fact that the King has a copy of my signature and seal. The knowledge may save you an unpleasant experience."

He started as though I had stabbed him, turned white, then scarlet, and trembled as with ague. "You shall pay dearly for your insult, Sir. You now are safe in your position, and may strike at your pleasure, but your time is short. You shall answer to me, Sir; yes, and before many days shall have passed, Master Everard."

"'Od's blood! how shocking! how shocking!"

"Oh, curse you!" he hissed with boyish temper, and strode hastily along the passage to his own

room; while I followed, chuckling softly at his fearful threats, and relishing the young gentleman's punishment.

He slammed the door in my face, at which I swore roundly; but remembering that I had naught to gain by losing my temper, I merely opened the door again and stepped within. His hand flew to his sword-hilt, as he wheeled and faced me in dumb surprise. Such insult was beyond his comprehension.

"Yes, you have your sword; 'tis your spurs you need, Sir Charles," I smiled, throwing my leg across the corner of his table.

"Very well, I'll get my spurs; but remember, the faster I ride the sooner shall end your advantage. Give a fool authority and soon he'll condemn himself." His hands shook with rage as he wrenched at the straps of his spurs. "You're in a larger and deeper pond than you think, Sir. I'm not the only one that you have to face; and I'm damned if you shall come out of it with a whole skin!" He drew his gauntlets on with a jerk and tossed his cloak over his arm.

"Tut, tut! Sir Charles, I fear you have turned gossip," I laughed. "You are telling what I already knew; but yet, I think your language indiscreet. Be cautious, Sir Charles; your associates would disapprove of your taking me into your confidence, I think. Ah! you are ready? Then we shall order your mount and escort."

"Escort! I need none!" he snapped.

"I hope you may not have need of it, yet 'tis better to take precautions, and besides, I have assured the King that you shall go with a good guard, so that no excuse for miscarriage may be found."

He made no reply; his anger seemed to choke him; so he sought relief in hasty, heavy strides, and almost rushed from the house.

At the men's quarters I drew them all up, that I might be able to make my selection. Toby took his place with the others, and seemed almost a mite beside the lusty-looking guardsmen.

"You need experienced men, Sir Charles," I said; "wherefore I select the three on the left, who seem to have years enough to give them caution."

He turned to me as though to object, but I met him with a smile, in which he read my reason for those men. He had been beaten at every point, and now his determination seemed to give way, and he offered no opposition.

In another ten minutes they were mounted and riding down the drive. As they circled round the lower terrace, Sir Charles turned his head and looked back. I waved my hand to him, at which he drove spurs into his horse and bounded off at a gallop. I laughed and turned—in time to see Sir Alfred step back into the house through a French window that opened to the front.

CHAPTER VI.

With but three of the soldiers left, I felt more comfortable for the time. They had no leader now to whom to look for instructions, and I knew they would not take upon themselves to act without orders, lest they should endanger the plans of their superiors. Sir Alfred was my only cause for anxiety. Where did he really stand in these much mixed affairs? He seemed on all sides, and against all sides. Was there really a plot to abduct the Queen, or was it, as Toby thought, a blind to the real plot—the carrying off of his daughter? Who was the tall Black Masque that had escaped with Sir Alfred that night in the lane? Was he but a tool, like his fellow that we had succeeded in taking, or a more important person, who had not yet played his full hand? The questions were perplexing, and at that time unanswerable. Sir Alfred was the centre of the wheel. What was the wisest course to take with him? was the question I first had to solve. I tried the solution at once, by stepping to the open window at which I had seen him.

"I am glad of it, if it will prevent so shameful a thing happening," came in her voice from the room.

"But it shall not prevent it. In faith, I prefer it

so. His departure will relieve him of all responsibility." Sir Alfred's voice was deep and ardent.

"But 'twas not to Sir Charles you gave your word."

"Bah! And what is the other? A soldier of fortune—a hireling."

"And does that save your honour, if you break faith with him? For shame, father, forget what——"

"Silence! How dare you so speak to me? Honour! 'Tis to save your honour that I do it. But mayhap you have less care for it than I," he sneered.

There was a moment's pause, in which I could picture the expression of her face.

"I pity you, Sir, and always shall pray to forget this day." There was a world of contempt in her low, trembling voice.

"No, Virginia, dear, I—I didn't mean that."

"I shall try to believe you."

"But come, Virginia, promise that you will go with me peaceably," he coaxed. "See what I sacrifice for you—even your respect for me."

"And all for me!" She gave a little forced laugh. "What part has my Lord Cadwaller in this sacrifice? Must not your *Master* be rewarded for making you his tool to serve his own unmanly ends?"

"Now, the devil take you! for your insults you shall go, consent or not! Inform the low-born menial,

whom you so admire! You shall go, despite him! You have dared to defy and insult me, so now I shall use my authority! I'll crush your mother's spirit in you, or I'll crush your life!"

"Oh, how I regret that I have found you out! Until to-day I always have spoken to you and of you with respect, and tried to respect you more than I felt; but now I am undeceived; you stand forth in your true colours, without honour, courage, or even humanity. I pity you, Sir!—from my soul I pity you!"

Zooks! I should rather face Toby's sword than her contempt.

"I think it were wiser to keep your pity for yourself," he sneered. "You may need it ere long, unless you learn to control that accursed tongue of yours. His Lordship is not blessed with such patience as your father's. Yes, exercise your obedience, my dear. Commence by getting your belongings together. You shall leave here to-night: to-morrow you shall be in France."

"France!"

"Yes, France. There we shall remain until our friends at Court succeed in diverting the King's attention from us."

"I refuse to go!" She stamped her foot.

"We shall leave this evening—remember!"

A door opened, then closed with a bang, and all was quiet within the room.

I tiptoed from the window, until I reached a safe

distance, then hastened in search of Toby, whom I found entertaining the three guardsmen outside the servants' quarters. He had them in a roar of laughter, which, as I came up, suddenly subsided. They rose and stood at attention, while Toby advanced to meet me. Together we started back toward the house, and when we were out of earshot of the men, I told him of Sir Alfred's treachery.

Toby tossed his head. "I thought he was mixed up in strange company for an honest man," he sniffed. "What shall we do, Sir?"

"We must go to him at once, before he has an opportunity to speak to the men."

As we turned the front corner of the house, we met him face to face.

He started. "Ah! Master Everard," said he, recovering his self-possession and forcing a smile.

"Ah! Sir Alfred Heron," I returned, smiling back at him broadly.

My manner did not seem to reassure him. His face grew redder than ever, and his eyes looked past me, as he said: "I was in search of you, Sir. If you have finished with your affairs, I am at your service, Sir,—quite at your service." He rubbed each hand over the other, as though trying to wash them with air.

I bowed and, still smiling, started with him across the lawn in front of the house, Toby following.

"May I request, Sir, that you first step with me

into the house? There is something on my mind that I wish to tell you, lest it should escape me."

He looked at me curiously, but seeing no reasonable excuse for declining, he turned without a word and led the way to the door. In the hall he faced me with almost defiance, though still attempting to play the affable. His acting seemed nearing its end.

"Yes, Master Everard?" he said, forcing a sorry smile, while his fingers drummed restlessly upon the back of a chair. "In what can I serve you?"

I took a turn around the room before answering: "By doing your duty, Sir Alfred."

He turned purple. "Really, Sir, I fail to see by what right you speak so to me!"

"By no right, Sir Alfred—nor yet with malice."

"I am in your power, and so cannot claim consideration," he said bitterly.

"Nonsense, Sir! You think you are far from being in my power! You think I'm in yours! Why could you not have dealt fairly with me, Sir Alfred? I gave you sufficient reason for trusting me." I thought it well to let him know at once how matters stood.

"What do you mean?" he cried, glancing anxiously toward the door.

"Toby!" I called gently.

"Yes, Sir!" He stood in the doorway.

"No one is to be permitted to pass out until I so order."

"No, Sir!" The door closed. Sir Alfred sank into a chair.

"Why did you not make your escape last night?" I asked.

"You prevented me," he answered, still attempting to fence.

"Nay, nay; I mean after that—when all had retired."

"More insult! Why, because I gave my word that I should not!" he snapped.

"Then why propose leaving to-night? Does your word bind you for but four-and-twenty hours?"

"Spy!" he cried, springing to his feet.

"Keep your seat, Sir Alfred; bluster will not help you. Yes, that is better. Now let us discuss the situation freely. But, in the first place, I wish to correct you. I did not spy on you. I saw you at the window, and was on my way to you, for the purpose of telling you that I had discovered your treachery, when I chanced to overhear the conversation between you and your daughter. 'Twas indiscreet to discuss such a matter so heatedly, but I assure you it made no difference, for I already had caught you in the act of motioning in a suspicious manner to Sir Charles Rawley, behind my back, in the morning-room, and had resolved to give you back your parole, lest you might break that that can never be mended."

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He wriggled in his seat, almost choking with shame and rage. "Dog!" he gasped, "I will split your heart for this!"

"I shall not quarrel with you, Sir. As I said before, my object in speaking as I do is not to torment you. I merely wish to let you see the exact position in which we each stand. If you will answer my questions, you will help to remove some of your difficulties; if you refuse—Zooks! the loss will be chiefly your own. Now why do you still trust this Sir Charles, after I have warned you of him?"

"Well, curse your impudence!" he almost choked, sitting bolt upright, and staring at me in astonishment. "Cannot you be insulted? I have heard you are a brave man, but find you a coward!"

"You are bent on insulting yourself," I smiled. "You ran from this *coward*."

In faith, I was having a hard struggle with my temper, but I had resolved not to lose it. His vile names were hard to bear, to be sure, but it is scarcely creditable to sacrifice one's determination for the gratifying of mere rage, therefore I gave no apparent heed to his insults, but continued my questions.

"Come, Sir, will you tell me the reason for your confidence in Sir Charles Rawley?"

"And why should I not take the word of Sir Charles Rawley—who is my friend—in preference to that of a nameless Jack, of whom I know nothing, who sells himself to the highest bidder?" he sneered.

"Then you were a party to the plot to carry off the Queen? I have thought otherwise."

"Plot! What plot to carry off the Queen?" His choler was giving place to anxiety.

"If Sir Charles is your friend, 'tis strange you should not know."

"As God's above me, I know naught of such a plot!" His fear had overcome his indignation.

"You were found in strange company for one not to be suspected."

"How?—when?—what company?" he stammered.

"On the night of the first of May, in the lane north of Fleet Street, when the attempt to abduct her Majesty and your daughter was defeated, Sir Alfred. Zooks! your memory seems failing, Sir."

"The Queen!" he cried. "That was not the Queen!" He trembled with excitement.

"Oh, indeed! I have been informed differently."

"Why, no! 'Twas a lady of the Court, to be sure, but not the Queen."

"From whom did you get your information?"

He hesitated. "From—from—— What's that to you?" he broke off abruptly.

I wondered if he was attempting to deceive me. He seemed sincere enough, yet I already had discovered that he was too good an actor to be judged by appearances.

"I venture to say, your daughter did not tell you it was not the Queen."

He said nothing, but looked mighty uncomfortable.

"No, Sir Alfred, the flight of your daughter is not the gravest charge that you shall have to answer;—'tis the attempt on the Queen. Believe me, your worst enemies could wish you to make a no worse mistake than to flee from England at present. 'Twould be a confirmation of your guilt."

"Nonsense, Sir! I say it was not the Queen!"

"And I say it was the Queen, Sir."

"Then why was no mention made of it in your warrant for my arrest?"

"One charge was sufficient, and I suppose the King has no desire to have the incident appear in writing. I believe there was a scandal once before about a similar affair. One can quite understand his shrinking from the risk of having so private a matter made public. Doubtless his Majesty intends settling it with you privately, how, I can only surmise."

"Surmise! Damn your surmisings!" he cried, springing to his feet. "You know how he hopes to settle it! You—you accursed hireling!—well do you know his intentions! 'Tis a lie, I believe, a lie of his, of your own, spinning, this story of the Queen! I see it all! He thinks he has me in his power, and will force me to gratify his base desires! Ha! ha! a trick—a most palpable trick! Ha! ha! upon my soul, 'tis laughable!"

"Very laughable," I put in. "Still, I think you

will find it more profitable to forego your demonstrations of delight, and consider the matter seriously."

Faith, his appearance gave but little suggestion of humour, except so far as a very angry, badly frightened, stout man, past the middle age, with too much blood in the head, may look comical, when attempting to rid himself of his fear by a stimulating outburst of ridiculing bluster.

"Seriously!" he cried scornfully, pacing to and fro furiously. "Ha! ha! I shall make it sufficiently serious for both you and your master, before you shall be through with this affair!" He paused for a moment and took snuff with trembling fingers. "Let him drive me to extremes, and I'll bring every detail before Parliament! Split me, if I'll be dishonoured by that—that—by his Majesty, or anyone else!"

"Ah! that is better," I said; "much better than fleeing, as though you acknowledged your guilt. Yet, 'twill mean your conviction of treason, I fear; for her Majesty most surely was there."

He halted before a window, and stared forth.

"But, of course, if you can rely upon the influence of them that shared the attack with you, 'tis possible you may escape the extreme penalty, mayhap even more."

His hands clasped each other more tightly behind his back, his feet he placed farther apart, and his head bent forward and to one side more, as he con-

tinued to stare through the window. His attitude was more resolute.

"Yes, I believe Lord Cadwaller might manage the King." I paused to observe the effect, but he did not move. "But he may meet with opposition, from what source, you doubtless know."

He turned and faced me in alarm. "What source?"

"Tut, tut, Sir! you well know my meaning. Why, the Little Duke, to be sure."

"That bastard Monmouth?" he cried, his face turning almost black with rage, and his hands working at his band, as though he were choking.

"You are not over-complimentary to his Grace, Sir. Why should you not expect him to oppose any of Cadwaller's efforts in your behalf?" I was not sure of my ground, so was compelled to go cautiously.

He succeeded in loosening his collar, and again sank into a chair. "Yes, yes, I see it all now," he muttered to himself.

"Well, Sir, if you see it all, 'tis possible you now understand why I warned you against your supposed friend, Sir Charles Rawley."

He shook his head from side to side sadly. "Nay, nay, I understand nothing. My God! was there ever before so snarled a tangle?"

"You now see I spoke the truth last night, when I told you that I had a tangle to unravel. The

matter is even more unpleasant than I then thought. Your position, Sir, is most unenviable."

"I am well aware of it, Sir. Think you it adds to your dignity thus to gloat over a victim? Had you a spark of manhood, you would blush for your part in this outrageous oppression. My case seems hopeless;"—he slowly rose to his feet—"but one thing is certain,—it never shall be said of a Heron that he permitted a daughter of his house to be handed over to a dissolute tyrant. I take back my parole,—I should have broken it and a dozen more to carry out my determination,—and now warn you that I shall escape from England, despite you or your King." He sprang to the door at one bound, and had it locked ere I could divine his purpose. "Your accursed Stuart never shall have me alive; and if you take my dead body, there shall be another with it." The old, aristocratic blood in his veins at last had asserted itself. So long as he was able to see an outlet, his weak nature had predominated; at bay, the courage of his ancestors came to his rescue.

Toby knocked at the door. "Do you want me, Sir?" he called.

"No, no, Toby; everything is well."

"Come, Sir," said Sir Alfred, "will you stand aside and permit me to pass peaceably?"

"To what purpose? Where do you wish to go?"

"To my daughter. I must learn from her

whether it was the Queen or not that occupied the second chair that night."

"I am here, my father," she said, stepping into view from a turning in the stairs.

Sir Alfred started, advanced two paces toward her, but halted by the table, as she came slowly down, pale, calm and dignified. I kept my place, with Sir Alfred between me and the door.

"You have been deceived, father; the Queen did occupy the other chair. I thought you knew." She placed her hand upon his shoulder as she spoke.

Sir Alfred did not speak; but his head bent forward and his shoulders rose and fell quickly, as though he struggled with a mighty load, and one too great for his courage. Presently he raised his head. "Then we must leave England," he said slowly, facing me determinedly.

"You see no other way out of your difficulties?" I asked.

He watched me closely, as though fearful of some sudden attack. "No," he answered.

"Remember, if you should escape, 'twould likely mean the confiscation of your estate."

The maiden turned crimson. "Which you place higher than honour?" she asked.

I bit my lip. "I but wish your father fully to understand his position, before undertaking a rash act."

"I have not asked your counsel, Sir," he put in haughtily, still watching me closely.

"And you, Madam, will you go with your father?"

"Why should I not, Sir? You no longer hold his parole."

"True; but I hold his life."

Her eyes opened wide with fear. She shrank from me, and drew nearer to her unworthy parent. "You—you would not—you——" she stammered.

"My word is given to the King that I will not permit Sir Alfred Heron nor his daughter to leave their home until I shall have received further orders from his Majesty. My promise should be carried out, even though Sir Alfred were my own father."

She clasped her hands before her, and leaning forward, pale-faced, wide-eyed and trembling, gazed at me for what seemed an age.

My eyes fell before the eloquent reproach. "Zounds!" I thought, "she has more soul than a thousand mere women."

"But—but—you said at the bridge that I—that we may rely on your sword for protection." The blood rushed to her face, and when I raised my eyes, hers sank before them.

Ah! that moment was worth a lifetime; and yet, I felt a sorrow that she—that anyone should think me capable of failing to make good a promise.

"You speak correctly, Madam; I did assure you of my assistance; but that I should be able to take the proper course, it was necessary that I should have more information concerning the whole matter. I now believe most of the mystery has been made

clear to me; therefore I shall know how best to act, when the time for action shall come."

Sir Alfred's eyes shifted from me to his daughter, then back to me again, in wonder.

"When I first came here," I continued, after a moment's pause, which I made that my words might take effect with him, "I formed the opinion that you, Sir, had been duped by men occupying higher positions, and that you were being used to hide their deeper plans. Then other things happened, which caused me to doubt this conclusion. I thought it best to question you, and show you on what dangerous ground you stand. You see how hopeless is your position; I see how I must go about to clear the mystery up. First, the idea of escape to France must be abandoned. Mature consideration will show you how hopeless such a course would be. 'Twould but rouse the King's determination; and in no spot in Christendom should you be beyond his reach, now that Louis is his friend. When this plan is given up, it leaves you with but one honourable alternative—the pacifying of the King."

"Pacifying! Do you know what that means?" he broke in.

His daughter blushed deeply and turned to the window.

"I said *honourable* alternative, Sir."

"'Twill be a surprise for his Majesty," he sneered.

"I hope you shall be able to play your part, Sir," I said drily.

Again he almost choked with rage, but I went on, without apparent notice. "The King, as I have said, must in some way be induced to believe in your ignorance of the Queen's presence when the attack was made, or at least be persuaded to treat you with leniency."

"Who will undertake the negotiations?"

The lady turned from the window and looked at me expectantly.

"The matter must take its own course, for the present. When the opportunity presents itself, I shall be prepared to do all in my power. I think we shall not have long to wait. Meantime, if you hope for a successful conclusion—I must have your confidence and support."

The lady looked anxious, and watched her father eagerly, while he remained silent, apparently in doubt as to what course to take.

At last he said: "The matter is of great weight, and one to which an answer cannot be given without deep consideration. At dinner-time I shall give you my decision. In the meantime I promise to take no action."

Again the lady's eyes sought mine. They now seemed to bear a message.

"Am I at liberty to leave my house?" Sir Alfred smiled faintly.

"I hope to see you at dinner, Sir," I bowed.

He unlocked and opened the door—and met Toby, who faced him with drawn sword.

"All is well, Toby," I nodded. "Permit Sir Alfred Heron to pass."

The little man frowned slightly, and drove his sword into its scabbard with a sharp click.

Sir Alfred strode forth with a swagger, then slackened his pace and crossed the lawn leisurely, his hands behind him.

I stepped to the door, and in a whisper, gave Toby his directions. "Follow him," I said, "wherever he goes; but offer no interference, unless he should attempt to speak with someone else."

Toby touched his hat in silence, and was off.

"Now, Madam, what is it?"

"It?—What?" she asked in wide surprise.

"Did you—did you not wish to speak to me?" She seemed possessed of an innocent way of making one feel uncomfortable.

She wrinkled her brow for a moment, as though in deep thought. "No, I think not." She reddened a little. "Ah, yes! I desired permission to leave the house; but I see you have sent Toby away, so I must wait my guard's return." She turned away with a grimace of mock resignation.

"Toby has received no such appointment. That honour I have reserved for myself."

"And have I no choice?" she asked sadly, her head bending in submission.

"None!" I said firmly.

"Then I bow to the inevitable." And with a mocking little smile, and head still bowed, she passed out; and I—twisting my mustaches—followed.

CHAPTER VII.

She had said she did not wish to speak with me; but I would have sworn that she had sent me a "speechless message" with her eyes, which plainly said: "When my father shall have left the room, I have something to tell you." When we left the house, I thought it was some foolish pride that made her deny that she had anything to say. But as we strolled slowly from one walk to another, and she spoke freely and light-heartedly of nothing more serious than the changed positions of the nests in the trees, the progress being made by divers early plants, or the neglect into which a certain arbour—which she volunteered to show me—might have fallen, during her absence, I came to the conclusion that my eyes must have deceived me.

That anyone in her position could speak so calmly of things most commonplace, was almost past belief; yet in her—strange as the statement may appear—it seemed most natural.

For this reason, it came to me as a surprise, rather than as that that most reasonably should have been expected long before, when, after explaining that this was her first visit to her old haunts since the previous year, she suddenly came to a halt and, facing me, asked abruptly: "How did it chance

that you undertook this task of apprehending us?" There was no anger nor reproach in her voice—the tones were half idly curious, half sad.

As I have said, her sudden return to seriousness took me something unawares; and I hesitated, therefore, before making reply.

Her patience vanished with her change of thought, for with a toss of her head she started on again. "I should not have asked you. I have overstepped the rights of a prisoner."

If her question surprised me, this sudden change of temper did not help to collect my wits. Faith, its total unwarrantableness set off a sudden anger within me.

"Halt!" I shouted sharply.

She started as though I had discharged a pistol, then turned in alarm, white-faced and trembling.

The blood rushed to my head, my brain swam, I felt my face burn as from fire, my eyes sought the ground,—and with uncovered head I took a step toward her.

She drew back to the side of the path, fearing that I should touch her. I should have preferred a sword-stroke.

"Madam," I said humbly, "forgive me. There is no excuse for the brutal way in which I spoke to you, I know. My hope of pardon lies in your generosity. Pardon an old soldier, whose rough life has made him more masterful than gallant."

Her head was bowed, when I looked up, but after

a little she raised her face to mine slowly. "It was my fault," she said quietly. "I had no reason in me, when I spoke so childishly. But I am so troubled, Sir, I scarce know what I say." Her voice trembled, and tears sprang to her eyes.

"I never shall forgive myself," I said bitterly.

"But you were in the right, Sir; you brought me to my senses."

"No, no, your kindness but makes me the more miserable."

"It was all my fault!" She stamped her foot impatiently.

Her emphasis warned me to desist, else we were like to run into greater difficulties: so I half-smiled and bowed in submission, which seemed to satisfy her, for she returned the smile, which presently became broader on both sides, and finally ended in a hearty laugh, in which our misunderstanding was borne away.

"And now, we are friends once more?" I asked.

She reddened a little, glanced away, then replied with great seriousness: "No, not friends, but enemies that are now allied against a common foe."

"Is it possible for foes to be allied?"

"The English and the Dutch are so united."

"And the common foe?" I asked, as we drew near the arbour.

She looked at me strangely. "Perchance I was wrong. *You* may have no enemies."

Why did I not bite my tongue to stop that ques-

tion? I meant it to draw out her confidence, but her reply showed me the unkindness of my words. It seemed as though my every effort was to wound her; and God knows how far were such intentions from me.

"Indeed I have many," I said hastily. "For that reason I wish to say to what one you refer in particular."

Again she glanced at me, but half-believing.

"That opens up the whole matter," she replied very seriously, her brow wrinkled and her whole manner almost comically deliberate and judge-like.

Here was my opportunity—now was my one chance to learn the many mysteries still unsolved—and I seized it.

"But that is what I most desire, Madam; if you will so honour me with your confidence."

We were at the arbour now—a pretty place, nothing fallen into neglect, as she had feared, but still retaining its quaint arrangement of seats and artful training of shrubs, a most restful and pleasing spot of originality and seclusion among the flowers. The little stream that we had visited in the morning glided quietly past us here, between banks of brightest green, which, on the side where we stood, was steep, but opposite climbed into a hill of long and gentle reach, and, with the exception of a few yards by the water's edge, covered with grand old trees. It was a place that made one think of a hot summer day in the peaceful shade, of books and a

long-stemmed pipe, of twittering birds and a life of ease, and—yes—a soft-voiced laugh, or a jolly romp. It showed one, more clearly than all your philosophies, the follies of intrigue, warfare, hardship and glory; and softly whispered to one's heart that here, and here only, could be found the real goal of all ambition—the rare contentment of a tranquil mind.

I had time for the dream ere the lady resumed.

"Yes," she said presently, seating herself, "that opens up the whole unfortunate affair. Why, why did I ever consent to think of courts? They contain naught but strife and wickedness. But you, Sir," she broke off, "you have not yet answered my question. How do you chance to be mixed in my unhappy fortunes? I shall not be so impatient this time," she added, with a sad little smile.

Before making reply I looked carefully around, to make sure that none could be eavesdropping; then taking a seat directly facing her, I said, speaking low: "A note was handed me by the landlord of the inn at which I was staying, which requested me to be present at the dance of which you know, and be prepared to render a noble service to the King."

"By whom was it signed?" the lady asked eagerly.

I smiled at her innocence. "'Tis not customary to sign such missives, Madam. It merely directed me to the place of merriment, and told how I should know the writer."

"Yes?" she asked, leaning forward with clasped hands and eager face.

"It said that I might know him by a masque of bright red, and that he would seek me out, if I would sit at table, and come without disguise."

"A red masque?" She shook her head. "I know of none that went so."

"Well, we met, as you know. He led me to a private room above-stairs, where I was presented—after some little dispute—to another gentleman, who there awaited us. They told me of a plot to abduct the Queen, and asked me to frustrate it. I consented—and succeeded, as you know. The next morning I went to Whitehall, at the command of the King, and was informed by him that the lady who had accompanied the Queen on the previous night had disappeared from the Palace most mysteriously. I handed to his Majesty a sword that I had taken from one of the conspirators. On the blade was engraved '*Sir Alfred Heron*' and a coat of arms. The King at once saw what had become of the lady. She was the daughter of Sir Alfred, he told me. A warrant for your father's arrest was given me, and I set out at once. The rest, Madam, is known to you."

"And you gave the sword to the King?" There was regret and reproach in her voice and look.

"I did, but without knowing aught of Sir Alfred. To me he was but a conspirator. Not once did I

dream that he was the father of the lady that had disappeared."

"No, no! How could you?" she said, after a little thought. "But did you not learn more of the man in the red masque?"

"Yes. He was the Duke of Monmouth."

"The Duke of Monmouth! And he told you of a plot to abduct the Queen?"

"Hush!" I held up a hand in warning. "There may be listeners about. Our conversation must be secret." Then, before answering, I took a look around among the trees and bushes. We were alone —seemingly.

"Yes," I said, coming back, "'twas his Grace that told me of the plot. The other gentleman was the King."

"The King! Was he there too?"

"In faith he was. And a close watch he had placed on the Queen and her companion."

"Oh, the treachery of it all! Why, Sir, 'twas the young Duke that persuaded my father to make the attempt to carry me off. He learned, in some way, of her Majesty's intentions—knew that I was chosen to accompany her—and then went to my father and proposed my abduction, as the best way of getting me away from that—that awful place. I thought he had told my father that it was with the Queen I should go; but even in that he was a knave, it would seem. And he told you it was for carrying off the Queen! Oh! is there no faith in man?"

She buried her face in her hands for a moment, then looked up again, wiping her eyes.

"But there must be some reason for this treachery. No man will make of himself a plain traitor, unless he hopes to further his selfish interests in some way. Can you not think of any object the Little Duke would have for wishing your plans to miscarry? He seemed most anxions that the abductors should be caught. In fact, he was quite annoyed when I refused an offer of assistance."

She thought for a moment, then blushed deeply and turned her head partly from me. "It might be because the Duke had some private quarrel with one by whom my father was assisted. I can think of no other reason," she said slowly, her eyes not meeting mine.

"And this one by whom your father was assisted; what is his name?"

She looked up quickly. "Is it right that I should tell you, Sir? I mean, would it be a betrayal of my father's confidence? I should like to tell, but know not if 'tis right. Guide me, Sir. I am but a poor, troubled maiden, driven almost to madness." There was a tremble in her voice, and her mouth quivered, as though she was near to giving way.

Here was something for which one would not look, under such circumstances, and also something that one should seldom find, if he should search for a life-time. "How can Sir Alfred Heron be the father of so noble a lady?" I wondered. "Zounds!

she's one in ten million!" I swore under my breath.

"Nay, Madam, do not tell me. A conscience like yours always will guide you aright. But luckily I know his name. Your father's companion was a certain Lord Cadwaller, a man of great friendship with the King.

Her head remained bowed, and she gave no sign of the effect of my words, save in the rosy colour that rushed up her neck to her cheeks, then receded, only to return again with the next breath. But from this I felt assured that Cadwaller was the man, for had I been wrong, she would have denied my assertion, I made no doubt. And now to learn more concerning this person that already had played so important a part in this business, and who—judging from what I had overheard of the conversation between Sir Alfred and his daughter—was like to reappear ere the play could be finished.

"'Tis unfortunate that his Lordship managed to escape us. Now, had he been taken, the situation would have been less uncomfortable for your father. Cadwaller's influence with the King would doubtless be strong enough to have everything hushed, for on his head the greater responsibility would rest; and the King, ever lenient with his personal friends, would, to shield the Earl, forego his vengeance on Sir Alfred. But as the matter now stands, with his Lordship unsuspected, the King will not be so ready to please his friend. Then, if there is a quarrel be-

tween Cadwaller and the Little Duke, the opposition of the latter must be considered also. For these reasons we must come to the conclusion that his Lordship will be of little, if any, assistance to us."

Her look became almost joyful. "Oh, I am so glad of that, Sir! I have nothing but contempt for the knave!" She clenched her little white fists in sudden fury. "If I were only a man!" (Eyes sparkling and lips compressed.)

I had a mind to tell her that the transformation would be far from an improvement. But I said nothing, and awaited the abating of the little tempest. And it soon came. Gradually the red lips and the hands relaxed, then slowly her face turned toward me, and catching a twinkle in my eye—a thing that I could not suppress—her sense of humour asserted itself, and she was unable to keep back a smile.

"Still, I do," she persisted, a moment later.

"Well—ah—well, can not that defensive alliance of which we were speaking be made to serve instead?"

She laughed a little, yet tried to appear impatient. "You are not over-serious, Sir," she pouted, toying with a ribbon.

"Oh, Madam, I protest!"

"Nay, nay, hush! as you told me a few moments since; there may be listeners, as you said. Much protesting, you know, is a sign of insincerity, they say." She was smiling again.

Zooks! 'twas a mighty difficult task for one to

remain serious for long, when in her presence. She was so young, and beautiful, and bright, and full of sunshine, even in such sore trouble, that she made one feel the fire, glory, and irrepressible light-heartedness of youth, despite a most embarrassing situation and five-and-thirty years of kicks about the world.

I again took my seat, and looked very serious, while she, after watching my expression for a moment, rested her chin upon the backs of her hands and stared off across the little stream, apparently lost in her thoughts.

"I wish I knew——" she started slowly, her eyes still directed across the stream—and there she stopped abruptly, and turned red, as though the words had slipped out half-unconsciously. For a fraction of a second she looked at me, then dropped her eyes again, with: "No, I did not mean it."

"Oh!" I said. "Should I feel pleased or annoyed?"

"If you will promise to be annoyed, I will tell you what I was about to say." (A little spitefully.)

"I swear to be angry and——"

"Swear?" she laughed.

My mustaches required a thoughtful twist. "No, not without special orders."

"Then I fear you will not be very angry."

"I only swear when amused."

"How full of amusement men's lives must be."

I made no return of the blow.

The little victory seemed to give her more confidence. "What I started to say was: I wish I knew you better—that is, I wish I could see how you will act in this trouble, and why you are working against my enemies. You know—you—you seem so honest, and yet—I—have seen you but once. I know not why I should trust you. You may be working against me, for—for aught I know to the contrary." Her head was bowed again, and while she spoke she plucked the petals from a rose bloom, one by one, and dropped them into her lap.

So sincere was my determination to see justice done to this poor maiden, that it had not seemed strange to me that she was so ready to trust and take me into her confidence. Yet now, when she spoke of it, I could not but wonder that she had been so confiding; for, as she said, she had not known of my existence until two days before. Faith, as I looked at the matter from her point of view, it became evident that I should explain my position; and at that moment it occurred to me that a reasonable explanation of why I was assisting her would be a mighty difficult and embarrassing thing to give.

"Gad!" I said, sorely puzzled, "I wonder not at your uncertainty. Now that you mention it, my position seems a strange one. The only explanation I can offer is that I am not hired by the King to do whatever he bids. True, I undertook to arrest your father, and to prevent your leaving here until I

should hear from his Majesty; but I promised no more. I made myself party to no undertaking that had the injury of an innocent person as its object; in fact, I undertook the service more for the purpose of seeing justice done, than aught else. I am not in the pay of the King, and when I hear from him, what I promised shall have been fulfilled. After that, 'tis possible his Majesty and I may differ on a question of justice—who can tell?"

While I was speaking, she kept her eyes fixed on the opposite bank, but when I had finished, she turned and looked at me steadily for a moment.

"As God's above us, Madam, I have told you the whole truth and nothing more," I said, uncovering.

"I believe you, Master Everard. I have trusted you ever since you came, though without a real reason. We shall be friends now—if you will, Sir." She put out the smallest, whitest little hand in the world.

"As well as allies," I reminded, bending over it.

She laughed, then turned serious. "But the King, Sir, is not the only one I fear," she said, with head turned partly from me; "though I must not further weary you with my troubles."

"If we are allies, you should tell me all; if friends and allies, the more reason for your confidence. The greater my knowledge of the whole matter, the less difficult will be my task of frustrating your persecutors, which in any event seems like to be sufficiently uncertain to lend zest to the enterprise."

She glanced around, then, lowering her voice and leaning forward a little, she said, very low: "'Tis undutiful to say it, I know, but you—you already know my father; he——"

"Yes, yes, I understand," I put in, for she seemed inclined to go no further.

"This Lord Cadwaller has some influence over him, I fear, and he——Oh, I cannot tell you, Sir, 'tis too shameful!"

"Yes," I said with a tightening about the jaws, "I have suspected this. Come, Madam, do not despair; neither the King nor Cadwaller yet has seriously harmed you, nor shall either, by Heaven!" I gave my hat a savage jerk forward over my eyes and stared at the opposite bank myself.

Neither spoke for some time, and I was wandering off through a whirl of plans for the defeating of them that soon were to be my opponents, when I heard a strange little laugh, and, turning to the lady, beheld her smiling through her tears.

"You swore," she said comically. "Are you amused?"

I tried to put reproof into my look, but, for some unknown reason, it would not come at my command; and as she continued to look at me with that half-laughing, half-tearful expression, I abandoned the effort, and smiled back broadly.

"No, that is the exception that proves my rule," I said, laughing.

At this moment a small piece of gravel struck

the rustic bench upon which I was sitting. The lady gave a little startled scream, and sprang to her feet, while my hand flew to my sword by instinct, as I arose and faced in the direction from which the stone seemed to have come. I listened intently, and thought I made out a faint sound, as of someone retreating from behind a hedge a few paces from the arbour, before which we had been sitting.

"Be not alarmed, Madam, and remain where you are; I shall return in a moment. I must search behind that hedge."

"Nay, nay, Sir, you must not! there may be danger there!" She put her hand on my arm in restraint.

"Danger!" I cried. "Ha! Danger and I are old friends." And gently releasing myself, I whipped out my sword and, crossing the open space at a run, cleared the hedge like a schoolboy. In the air I wondered at my activity.

But not a soul could I find, though I searched in every place that offered a chance of concealment. If any one had been there, listening, 'twas evident he had made his escape; though how he managed it so quietly, I could not make out. There was also the possibility that I had mistaken the place whence the sound came. The strangeness of the incident then occurred to me. "Why should an eavesdropper wish to attract my attention to his presence?" I wondered. This thought gave me a

sudden shock. "What if it is but a plan to get me away from the lady?" I gasped, and started back with all speed. As I came up to the hedge I peeped over, half-fearful lest I should find that she had disappeared. Then I gave a sigh of relief, and returned to her presence with more dignity than I had displayed in leaving.

At my approach she turned from a maid, to whom she had been speaking, and advanced a few steps toward me.

"Yes?" she asked, her face anxious.

"No one," I replied, raising my eyebrows and nodding in the direction of the other.

"My maid, to say that 'tis dinner-time. But was there no sign of anyone?"

"No. 'Tis possible it came from the other side of the stream, or it may have been our imagination." I wished to relieve her mind of anxiety.

"But the stone was not imagination. Here it is." She handed me a little pebble about the size of a chestnut.

"A bird may have dropped it," I said carelessly.

She looked at me peculiarly, evidently suspecting my object, but said nothing. Then, turning to the maid—Martha, she called her—she sent her back to the house, after telling her we should follow directly.

"Come," she said, after standing silent so long as the maid was in sight, "whom do you suspect?"

"Of what?" Her question came with too great a suddenness.

"Of throwing the pebble, to be sure."

"Suspect! Why, I can form no idea; for there is no apparent object that anyone listening could have in wishing to call our attention to his presence."

"I don't agree with you in this," she said, smiling a little—at what, I could not imagine.

"In what do we disagree?"

"I think there was someone there. Yes, more than someone." She nodded her head very wisely. Then a startled and pained look came over her face, and I heard her mutter: "No, no, not that!—he surely would not!"

I watched her curiously. "Here is the strangest puzzle with which I ever have been confronted—ay, and the most lovely! Zounds! what a wondrous combination! Youth, wit, and reason, and all done up in the most beautiful and bewitching little bundle possible to imagine. Tears one moment, then a strange little laugh, that, some way, goes to one's heart more than the tears; and then, while the pathos and humour are mixing within you, out pops a sunbeam of rare penetration. Zooks! she is a marvel of harmony and discord; but, spit me! the discords seem harmony too." I shook my head. "Strange, strange!" I muttered, "but she makes one feel—feel—ah—ah—well—boyish. Now I wonder—I wonder—what the devil do I wonder? Oh!

I must be over hungry," I concluded, and started after her, who stood waiting a few paces up the path. Her face wore a little smile of half-amusement, half-surprise.

"What were you considering so deeply?" she questioned, as I came up.

"Considering!—Was I considering?"

A shadow of annoyance passed over her face. "You should best know, Sir."

"Oh, yes—to be sure!—why, certainly!" I stammered uneasily.

She raised her eyebrows and looked at me curiously.

"Yes,—that stone—strange, the way it fell. Who could have thrown it, I wonder?"

She fixed her eyes on the house and smiled strangely. "A bird dropped it, did it not? I fear you are forgetful, Sir."

"Oh, yes—yes—pardon me; I had forgot. But look! How beautiful!" I broke off, stopping beside a bush that was one mass of blooms, on one of which a huge butterfly was sunning himself and lazily waving his wings, as though breathing in the perfume.

"Yes, beautiful, and so opportune!" she laughed. "Give me your hat, Sir; I must catch it."

But the purplish beauty had no mind for being caught; for as the lady attempted to drop the hat over him, he made a demi-volte and flashed beneath her arm.

"Oh!" she cried in disappointment.

"Quick!" I seized the hat and started in pursuit. He dodged quickly from one bush to another, leading me a lively chase. Then I was almost upon him. He circled beautifully, as though to pass behind a brier bush, but changing his mind at the last moment, he darted quickly upward, as though in sudden fright. I swore and followed—missed him by an inch—and came down upon something that groaned sadly, as it and I rolled into the sweet but sharp-toothed bush. "Oh, Lord!" cried Toby, as he scrambled to his feet, "you almost broke my back, Sir!" And then, with one hand held to his back and the other over his mouth, he made a sound not unlike a smothered cough. I'll swear he was laughing.

"Damn you, Toby! why don't keep out of the way?" I stormed, lifting up myself and my sad-looking hat. "Confound you! you're always where least expected!"

"Very sorry, Sir!—sorry you missed it, Sir!" He bowed and brushed himself vigorously.

"Missed what?"

"Why, the butterfly, Sir."

I ground my teeth. Here was the second time he had caught me playing the fool,—feeding fishes in the morning, chasing butterflies at noon. Lord! what next?

"Yes, I hate butterflies," I growled, with as good a look of truth as I could put on. "I always kill

them when I can." How weak it sounded! But Toby managed to keep control of his features.

"Why did you throw the stone?" I questioned, glad to change the subject.

"Sir Alfred had just reached the hedge, Sir, and was watching you."

"Where is he now?"

"Gone on toward the house, Sir."

"Quick, then; follow him! I hope you're not hurt, Toby."

"Oh, no, Sir! Sorry you missed it, Sir."

I shook my fist at his retreating figure, then turned back to where I had left the lady.

"Did you not get it?" In her voice was disappointment, in her eyes a merry twinkle.

"No, Madam; but it got me."

"What?—the butterfly?" She laughed outright.

"No;—a brier bush."

"Oh! Were you injured?"

"My temper, chiefly." I was half-angry, yet tempted to laugh.

She hesitated a moment, as though wondering if it was safe to say what she had in mind; but the temptation was too great. "Were you—were you amused?"

I could not keep from laughing. "Well, just a little—a very little. I now regret that I did not indulge myself more."

"But was all your conversation with the bush and the butterfly?"

I hesitated—considered—and decided that to one of her character the truth should be told. "Nay; Toby was there," I said quietly.

She blushed deeply, bit her lip, as though to keep back an exclamation of pain, and walked on with quickened step and in silence to the house. And through dinner she said scarcely a word, though her father, who decided to be guided by me, laughed and chatted merrily, as though he and I had been comrades.

For his daughter's sake, I treated him as a gentleman, and, though it went mightily against my stomach, conversed with him freely.

CHAPTER VIII.

I now felt no fear that Sir Alfred would again change his mind and decide that his former plan—that is, to run away—was wiser than to remain. He saw clearly, I made no doubt, that his only chance of extricating himself from his difficulties lay in the advice I had given him. He was a coward, as well as a knave, I was forced to confess, and in his cowardice lay the secret of his apparently brave selection,—he feared to flee, lest he then should cut himself off from all hopes of compromise or pardon; for he well knew I spoke truth when I said there was no place in Christendom in which he long could hide from his Majesty, King Charles of England. No, I did not look for any serious trouble from Sir Alfred—he now would rely on me from necessity, for the present, at least;—'twas this Cadwaller, backed by the King, that caused my chief anxiety. From the time when I overheard the stormy conversation between father and daughter, I had formed my opinion of the plans of his Lordship. That the maiden had but a faint suspicion of the depth of degradation that was being prepared for her, I knew full well. As for Sir Alfred, I felt inclined to believe that he too was partly in ignorance, even though he had shown himself to be capable of almost

any villainy. In my own mind was locked the miserable knowledge of their vile plans, the thoughts of which, whether I strolled idly through the park or tossed upon my bed, set such a fire to burn within me as made me long for a moment when this uncertainty should be at an end, and I should stand face to face with them that held the power.

But my hope that I should not have long to wait ere matters were brought to a climax was doomed to disappointment. There came no message from the King the day following the departure of Sir Charles, though I fully expected his Majesty to act with promptness. The next passed the same, and for a week after that we were kept in anxious uncertainty.

Sir Alfred became irritable and excited; Toby, for some unexplainable reason, avoided my presence, and sulked; Mistress Heron fed the fishes and grew more reserved, and rarely was seen without her maid, Martha, at her heels; while I developed something of Sir Alfred's temper, and swore at the servants, became less hearty at table, and sat beside the little stream, alone, and stared into the water with eyes that did not see.

Sometimes I spent a whole morning in an attempt to lose myself in the park—to get away from everything—away from myself. But always on these wanderings, the uncomfortable feeling that I was not alone—that some one was following me—would not be shaken off. "'Tis a foolish idea,

to be sure," I thought. "Yes, upon my soul, 'tis childish!" Then I would stop and consider. "What the devil is the matter with me?" I would cry out peevishly. "I must be far from well," I would conclude, and then return to my favourite spot near the arbour, and try to see the fishes in the stream. But still the feeling of another presence would not leave me—a presence not to be desired.

On the eighth day after the return of Sir Charles to London, I was sitting by the stream as usual, oppressed by the same unexplainable melancholy that now had become a part of me, when I heard a lady's voice, and, glancing over my shoulder, beheld Mistress Heron and her maid emerging from the path. The lady was laughing, as though in high glee, and telling something to the other. I know not what caused it, but a boyish impulse to run came over me, and, obeying its dictate, I dodged quickly behind a bush and ran hastily back until I had passed the end of the hedge, round which I went almost silently. Then I peeped out to see if I had been detected. No; she was seated now, and while I watched, she turned to the rose-bush behind her bench and plucked a bloom, as she had on that first morning. For a moment she was serious, then the maid said something, and the lady clapped her hands joyously, and her merry laugh came to me. I turned on my heel and walked away, with mixed feelings of sadness and anger.

"She is happy and gay and thoughtless," I muttered, "and I am sad, gloomy, and—— Ha, you knave! So I have caught you at last!" And I let out my wrath in the pursuit and capture of the fleeing Julius, the porter.

He was gliding from behind one tree to another when I spied him, but seeing that he was detected he threw off his snake-like manner for the nonce, and showed a cleaner pair of heels than one should expect in so slow-moving an animal. He fled for but a score of yards, however, for his foot caught on a projecting root, and he sprawled at full length upon the grass. As he regained his feet I was upon him. My mind was in no condition to exercise leniency. I seized him by the collar, and shook him until his teeth rattled, then administered as liberal a quantity of boot leather as my toe could well stand.

"Now hark, you spying villain," I said, when I had exhausted my list of stronger terms. "If ever again I catch you at such practice, 'tis steel instead of leather I will use! There, begone, and thank heaven that you have escaped with your life!" I gave him a final shake and push from me.

Not a word did he utter, and no struggle did he make, but took his punishment with scowling passiveness. When I bade him go, he stared at me savagely for a moment, then turned, still silent, and sneaked off. At a dozen paces from me he halted, turned slowly, and cast at me another look of hatred.

Yes, plainly that look meant murder. The face was still of the almost yellow hue—no trace of a fiery passion. 'Twas in its hellish calmness that the menace lay—a calmness as hideous as unnatural. Not even in the eyes did a fire burn—'twas a masque of Death, as perfect as any that the most morbid sculptor could dream of; and the lank and dead black hair made a fitting drape. As Toby said, when I told him of the incident, the creature reminded one of the vile insects under a rotten log.

The devil boiled up within me as he stared. I took a step toward him, my hand upon my hilt, but he limped off through the bushes, and in a moment was out of sight. I leaned against a tree and stared after him, while the conviction that this half-dead fiend and I some day should have a greater difference to settle was forced in upon me.

"Yes," I muttered, "there is here the hand of Destiny. Either that devil was born to murder me, or I sent here to rid the earth of that foul ulcer. Which? I wonder. Well, something tells me we shall not have long to wait for the answer; and which it is—bah! I care not." Then I laughed at my foolishness, but turned with a start at the sound of a footstep behind me.

A little scream. "Oh, you frightened me!" she cried reproachfully. "Why so warlike?" she smiled in surprise.

I sheathed my blade in confusion, and bowed, feeling mighty foolish and uncomfortable the while.

"I just have finished chastising a spy, Madam. He left but now, and when I heard you behind me, I thought he might be returning."

"A spy!"

"Ay, Madam; a most loathsome creature—Julius, he is called, I think." From some absurd cause, I felt quarrelsome—felt like blaming her for something—wished to put her in the wrong; therefore I emphasized the loathing I felt for this Julius—the thing that she had defended the first morning at the bridge.

"Julius!" She raised her eyebrows. "And have you not outgrown your dislike for poor Julius?" She laughed provokingly. "And Julius a spy! Fie, Sir! you wrong him. There must be some mistake. But did you hurt him?" Her voice was anxious and a little severe, I thought.

"Nay, I fear not," I replied coldly; "for the thing seems possessed of no feeling. Next time I shall try steel."

"No, no, you must not! What has he done to make you speak so bitterly?"

Her great solicitude for the knave but irritated me the more.

"What has he done? He has followed me every day since I came here. He dogs me wherever I go. To-day was the first time I succeeded in catching him—the next shall be the last." I know my manner was brutal, but I felt the ill-temper within me, and it would force itself out.

Her face took on a startled look, and she drew back, as though in fear. "You—you must not kill him!" she said earnestly. "Nay, please promise me that you will not." She held out her hands in supplication.

I smiled, but the smile was mirthless, for my heart was bitter. An unworthy question came to my lips, but, thank God, I kept it back, and blushed for it.

"Think not that I wish you to be harmed," she went on in a lower voice; "but I know he means you no injury; 'tis but because he looks upon you as my enemy. I shall see that he will trouble you no more, Sir. Now, will you be less warlike?" She laughed a little uneasily.

"Oh, Madam, you need have no fear for your servant. I am no murderous ruffian that slays without provocation. I shall harm no one, save in self-defence; but the actions of this Julius seem mighty suspicious, and I have no liking for the knife of such a knave between my shoulders. He may, as you say, mean me no harm, but he has a look about him not encouraging to confidence."

Her eyes flashed in anger for a moment, then she lowered them, her toe tapping the grass impatiently.

I leaned against a tree and dug holes in the ground with the heel of my boot, while strong feelings of anger, disappointment, and—I know not what, surged and mixed uncomfortably within me. I felt like swearing, crying out with a groan, or anything foolish; but I bored holes, and said nothing.

"You know," she said presently, "I can not blame you for disliking him; his appearance is against him. I feel uncomfortable when I look at the fellow myself. But he is so faithful a creature that I think it a duty to treat him with kindness. Come, we must not quarrel over a servant. I shall warn him to trouble you no more."

There now seemed to be no room for a misunderstanding. Her reserve of the past few days had disappeared. She had made a step in the direction of the renewal of our former peaceful relations. My gloom melted; my unreasonable anger against every one and everything settled down into a more generous feeling; the old Spirit of the Park shook off the frown he had been wearing, and smiled as on that first day—yea, I even fancied that he chuckled softly, as though enjoying some rich joke. I had lost some dignity, mayhap, and a little temper; but I felt no inconvenience from the loss—I was lighter without them.

"I hope, Madam, you again will forgive my roughness," I said earnestly. "I am always craving your pardon for some hasty rudeness, it seems. I fear you will weary of it, and think me insincere."

"Nay, nay! 'tis not wholly your fault, Sir," she said with mock severity. "You are afflicted with a monstrous bad temper,—therefore allowances must be made. This time I shall exercise leniency; the next shall be the last!" She frowned, stamped her foot, and imitated my manner so ludicrously

that—though I felt a little uncomfortable—I was forced to laugh aloud.

"Nay, I fear I am too lenient. You must not escape without punishment. Surrender your sword, Sir.

I surrendered.

"Oh! 'tis very heavy," she cried, with a most comic look of disappointment, as the point bent to the ground. "Faith, I must use both hands, I fear." Then she took her stand against a tree, and with arms locked over the hilt, and the point resting on the ground, she bowed her head upon her breast and looked frowningly off through the trees in the most laughable imitation of me. Suddenly she started up, listened for an instant, then sprang from her position and brandished the blade threateningly.

I took the cue, and jumped back with: "Oh! you frightened me." And then we both laughed until the park rang.

"Now, are you sufficiently punished?" Again she was trying to look severe.

"Nay, I fear not. You must do that again."

"No; that awful sword is too heavy. 'Tis more punishment to the innocent than to the wicked." With both hands she pointed the weapon at me.

"That awful sword? Oh, Madam, you are cruel! Yes; for that good old blade and I have weathered many storms together. For more than ten years it has hung from my shoulder—always faithful, ready, and eager to defend. There"—I pointed to a nick

near the hilt—"is an old scar to bear witness of what I owe it. The blow that caused that gash was meant for me. I leave it there for old memory's sake. That blade is no courtier's toy, Madam, but a rough and—unless in the right hands—clumsy old warrior. No high-polished bauble, full of tricks and flourishes, but a true bit of steel, which never will fail."

"I believe you love it." She smiled gently.

"Love it! I do. 'Tis all I ever have loved—it and—and—Toby."

She bent over the hilt and examined it very carefully. "Yes, 'tis a stout old blade," she said quietly. Then she gave it back to me,—looking toward the arbour. "Are you coming this way?" Her voice had a strange tremble in it, and she did not look at me.

"I wonder if anything I said hurt her?" I muttered. Then I caught sight of her face. . . . she was smiling.

As we passed through the opening in the hedge, a man-servant was talking with the maid, who pointed to the place from which we were coming. The man turned and came hastily toward us; but when asked his business, he glanced at me uneasily, fingering his hat the while, and needs must again be commanded ere he would deliver his message.

"'Tis a coach, Ma'am, that has just arrived," says the fellow, still eyeing me anxiously.

"Well, and is that all?" Mistress Heron tapped her foot impatiently.

"And—and, may it please you, Ma'am, the Master told me to say, Ma'am,——"

"Yes, yes, and you have said it more than sufficient! What is your message?" She stamped her foot in emphasis.

The fellow took one last look at me, then, throwing caution to the winds—and breaking orders, I warrant,—he said:

"The Master said, Ma'am, that you will please to come to him at the Hall."

"Yes, yes—and the coach. Who came in the coach?"

"A gentleman, Ma'am. Lord—Lord—. I forget the name, Ma'am."

"Return, and tell your Master that you have delivered your message," I put in, for the lady turned to me appealingly.

The fellow glanced at his Mistress.

"Go! Must I speak twice?" I shouted. . . . He vanished.

"Ha!" I puzzled, when we were seated and the maid dismissed. "How comes he here? Monmouth must have been outwitted."

"Oh, now start my greatest troubles! Do you think he has orders from the King to—take me away?" She was pale and trembling.

"If so, he has found a nice, warm, dry soil in which to lie," I laughed savagely.

"But the King's orders!"

"I have not yet been told that his Lordship bears them. But if it should come to that,—there's for the King and his orders." I snapped my fingers in the air.

"But, oh, Sir, you know what that means to you! Please promise me that you will not act rashly! Come, you know you are inclined to be to rash! And if you should come to grief on my account, I never could forgive myself! Promise me, before you meet this man, that you will be politic. Outwit him, but do not leave yourself open to a serious charge!" Her voice was eloquent beyond description, and her look beseeching and full of trouble.

I smiled back reassuringly. "Have no fear for me, Madam. Kings are not so difficult animals to manage as people are inclined to imagine. I have had much to do with them in my time, and have learned that a stiff upper lip has more power than a bended knee. Do not act with his Lordship as though you fear him, and I will look out for the rest."

At this moment Toby came up hastily. Halting, he touched his hat smartly, then stood motionless, awaiting my speech.

"Yes, Toby?"

"The Black Masque that escaped, I'll be sworn, Sir. Calls himself Lord Cad—something. Just arrived in a coach, with but the coachman and one servant. He sent for me, Sir, and ordered me (Toby

almost choked on the 'ordered') to tell you to report to him at once, Sir." He sniffed indignantly.

I sprang to my feet—so did Mistress Heron, who fixed her eyes anxiously on my face. "Return, Toby, and tell his Lordship, with my compliments, to go to the devil. I take orders from no one."

Toby touched his hat and turned without a word.

"Toby!" I called, as he reached the path.

"Yes, Sir!"

"Deliver my message word for word, and be where I easily can find you in half an hour."

"Yes, Sir!" And he was gone.

"Oh, dear, dear, such a hot-head! I am unable to manage you!" She shook her head mournfully as she took her seat. But for all that, I could see she was glad his Lordship at last had met with a rebuff that would sorely wound his dignity.

I said nothing, but, again taking my seat, pulled at my upper lip thoughtfully.

"But will Toby deliver your message as you told him?" she smiled.

I laughed. "And it were the King himself, not a jot of amendment would Toby make."

She again shook her head. "What a strange pair of men!" she said musingly. "Master and man—and how well matched!" Then she looked off across the stream, with a strange, half-sad little smile.

And I sat twisting my mustaches—and wondering.

CHAPTER IX.

At the end of half an hour, when we emerged from the path and started to cross the lawn, we beheld Sir Alfred, arm and arm with the Earl, strolling to and fro before the house.

Mistress Heron turned white of a sudden as she saw them, and then she drew closer to me, as though for protection.

Then Sir Alfred caught sight of us, and the two stopped and, after a hasty glance toward us from Cadwaller, they entered into what seemed a most absorbing conversation; for no notice did they take of our approach until we were within a dozen paces of them, when his Lordship turned with a start and at sight of us came forward, bending low, with hat in hand.

"You see, Madam, how impossible is life at Whitehall now. Faith, we've been groping in the dark since our bright star fled; but I saw it sparkling in the east, and followed." He attempted to take her hand as he finished this piece of nonsense, but the lady put her hands behind her back and bowed coldly, at which his Lordship turned red to the roots of his hair, and cried out, with a mighty poor attempt at a smile:

"Cruelty, thy name is woman! Old William should have writ it so. 'Slife! were not ladies

to be judged by the opposite to their words and acts, my heart might well be heavy." He laughed uneasily, and turned to Sir Alfred. "I fear 'tis evil communications. You know what our old friend——"

"Toby!" I called aloud, seeing the little man standing a score of yards away.

The Earl turned with a half muttered oath and stared at me with flashing eyes. Sir Alfred looked frightened, and drummed his fingers upon his snuff-box uneasily. His daughter seemed startled, and watched me anxiously. And Toby hastened to where we stood.

"Oh, Toby, I gave you a message some little while since. Do you remember?"

"Yes, Sir."

"And did you deliver it?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Very well, Toby—that will do."

Cadwaller turned a deeper scarlet, and glared savagely, first at me, then at Toby. From me he got a straight stare, from Toby a good imitation of me.

"Ha, ha! how very clever! 'Od's fish! who would look for such wit in a brigand? 'Pon my soul, Sir Alfred, you've made a find!"

"Fie, fie, my Lord! you would make me your equal. Believe me, I am not so ambitious."

"What the devil does he mean, Sir Alfred? My rough journey has muddled my wits."

"Come, come, gentlemen, no quarreling! Remember the servants!" Sir Alfred anxiously put in. "And you, Virginia,—I understand not your rudeness to his Lordship, to whom we owe so much. I give you to understand that it will be through Lord Cadwaller's good offices that we shall escape from the embarrassing position in which we now stand. And it will be more becoming to drop this absurd reserve, and treat with due respect the nobleman whose wife you soon shall be." As he finished he glanced at me, as though what he said was meant for the ears of more than his daughter.

Her face was pale as she made reply, but she held her head high and spoke with such a calm dignity that it gave what she said a power far beyond what one would expect from a sorely troubled maiden.

"Lord Cadwaller has received from me all the courtesy that I owe him,—ay, and more. You say that through his good offices we shall escape from our difficulties. If I mistake not, 'twas partly through his *good offices* that we fell into them. You speak of him as the nobleman whose wife I soon shall be. To that both you and he have had my answer before,—and that answer is—*never*—do you hear?—*Never*, my Lord!" And she turned to Cadwaller and cast at him a glance of unspeakable contempt.

"Silence, you hussy!" Sir Alfred choked, purple with rage. "Damnation! am I to be ruined by the caprices of a child? 'Slife! you would send me

to the block for the sake of a senseless whim. Into the house, now! I see I must treat you as I should have long since!"

I swear before Heaven, had he not been her father, I should have run him through ere he had half finished his abuse! So, so contemptible a creature for a father!—and *her* father! As it was, my hand swept to my hilt by impulse.

Even Cadwaller seemed less a brute,—or it may have been his trickery that prompted his apparent kindness. "Nay, nay," he said; "you are too harsh with the maiden, Sir Alfred! I pray you be more indulgent. They are all alike,—ever ready to shy at what is for their good. They must be treated with kindness. Your daughter is but a lass, Sir, and must needs have her fling. Her heart is right, I'll be sworn! Come, old war-horse, you have made her weep, I'll warrant! Now go after and let her not spoil those pretty eyes." He poked Sir Alfred in the ribs with his thumb, and shoved him gently by the shoulders.

My position was unenviable. I had no right to interfere between father and daughter, though I was resolved that in the end the daughter should have justice. I was forced, therefore, to say nothing just then, but I ground my teeth and swore within me that I would make her persecutors pay dearly for their work. Sir Alfred was an overbearing old coward and fool, who could put on a mighty daring and insolent front,—when he felt sure of strong

backing. Lord Cadwaller, I perceived, was a low animal, confident of his power, who was possessed of a cunning of a certain sort, which made him a dangerous opponent. That Sir Alfred was completely under his influence was evident. Together they made a most difficult pair of knaves to manage. . . . And behind all I could see the swarthy shadow of the King. And here was I—and Toby—to face them all. But with us I felt a great force—'twas the will of a maiden that no power of evil could shake. I filled with admiration as I thought of the answer she had given her father and this menial of the King. The indignation that was boiling within my heart made me not inclined to treat his Lordship with great consideration.

"Now," he said, when Sir Alfred was out of earshot, "we may talk, Sir."

"Yes, my Lord, I think it well that we should have some little understanding."

He stroked his jaw thoughtfully, and watched the setting sun for a moment. Then he said: "What say you, Sir?—shall we walk or speak within doors?"

"Walk." And we started back toward the arbour.

"Now, Master Everard, in the first place, I must inform you that your services to the King are at an end." He paused and glanced at me, as though expecting some comment; but I made none. "His Majesty is well pleased, I think, with your work,

and will doubtless be liberal in his reward." Again the Earl paused to watch the effect of his words. "This business has been, from the first to last, no more than a huge misunderstanding, with an attempt by an enemy of Sir Alfred to give the affair an air of gravity. The plans of this malicious person have been defeated, however, and the King has come to see plainly that Sir Alfred has been standing in a false light, cast on him by this other." He walked on in silence, his hands behind him.

I said nothing, but thought quickly;—and in another moment we reached the arbour. Seating myself carelessly, and crossing my legs, I looked off to the other bank, as usual, and twisted my mustaches in silence; while his Lordship stood drumming his fingers upon the back of a seat before me. Presently I threw back my head and laughed aloud. Cadwaller started as though I had dealt him a blow, but quickly recovered his self-possession.

"What the devil——?" said he, and then broke off.

"Zounds, my Lord! 'tis amusing, upon my soul!"

"What?—ah, yes, very. Ha, ha!" he laughed feebly. Then his face became severe, as though he thought he lacked dignity.

"Yes, my Lord, is it not strange that every set of conspirators must have its fool, whoever pays the cost?"

"I fear I understand you not, my man."

I took no notice of his insulting manner. "For

the benefit of your Lordship, then, I shall speak in plainer terms. I say 'tis strange that every band of conspirators—or brigands, if you prefer that name—should have its Sir Alfred, who pays the penalty for all."

He swore most foully. "What the devil do you mean by these riddles? Sir Alfred a fool, forsooth! and paying the penalty for all! You are more madman than knave, Sir, I warrant. But have a care how you insult me. You know not the length of my arm."

"Bah, my Lord! you have no arm of your own! You are but the dog of the King—a King Charles spaniel, by Heaven! and must dance as he fiddles! Come, come, my Lord, Mistress Gwynne has taught you well, but this acting has no weight with me. Cast it aside. I am in no mood for high words, and may lose patience."

His sword flew from its scabbard, and calling me a foul name, he stepped forward.

I sprang to my feet, and a spark flew from our meeting blades. Cadwaller's back was to the stream and as he retreated from my first lunge, he felt the slope of the bank. He swung round with great lightness of foot, that I might not have this advantage, and by that, I believe, saved my life. For as I turned with him, still engaged, the last gleam of red from the western sky fell upon the hedge, now behind my antagonist. There it was, peering over—the sallow, corpse-like face of that devil Julius. A

chill ran through me as I beheld it, and the same uncontrollable rage that always came to me when I looked upon this creature, suddenly possessed me. At that moment Cadwaller's foot struck against the leg of a seat, and he fell backward to the ground. I sprang toward the hedge, but the face disappeared ere I had taken a step. I peered over, but the gathering shadows made too deep a screen, and I could see but a little way beyond. It was useless to follow, I knew; and the thought came to me that the Earl might misinterpret my act, were I to leave him without explanation. So I turned again to his Lordship with a mind to let loose my rage upon him.

He stood with sheathed blade beside the seat that had caused his fall. "I am injured from my accident, Master Everard, and am therefore unable to continue our contest. So soon as my arm shall have recovered sufficiently I shall kill you—by God, I shall!" His eyes blazed, and he held his head bent forward, as one that meant his words. Indeed he had a dignity about him, this knave, and was far from being the fool he at times tried to lead one to think him. He cut a fine figure as he stood by the rustic bench, his spotless ruffles and fine plumes giving him an air and a grace not displeasing, even though he was something overdressed.

"Had I died every time I have been told that, my Lord, I now should be but the faintest fragment of a worn-out ghost, more full of perforations than a

pin-cushion," I smiled, my anger subsiding when I saw that he had no intention of renewing our little difference.

Of course you must not for a moment think that I believed him to be injured—in fact, I knew his story to be but a lie, for I had seen him fall fairly upon the soft grass. He had some other reason for thus excusing himself, I knew, but what that reason was, could only be conjectured. What first occurred to me was cowardice; but if this were true, why had he drawn his blade, knowing, as he doubtless did, my skill in swordsmanship? No, the fear of being injured was not the reason. When he had taken time to think the matter over, during my rush to the hedge, he came to the conclusion that it was foolish to take the risk of spoiling his game, when his purpose could better be accomplished by strategy. He looked not the coward, but the calculating trickster who was too clever to use force where *finesse* would accomplish his purpose.

He looked at me strangely for a little space, and I could see in his eyes that a struggle was taking place within him. As a man experienced in the ways of all kinds of men, I had no great difficulty in reading his new plan. He thought he now knew me and had discovered my weakness.

"You are a brave man, Master Everard," says he very slowly, and with a good shade of admiration in his voice, "but with sad failing. You are over-reckless. 'Tis a pity that a man of your parts

should so disregard his opportunities!" And his Lordship sighs heavily and seats himself.

"Faith, my Lord, I miss your meaning," I replied with a great show of interest.

He shook his head and went on, as though more to himself than me. "Brave men always arouse my admiration. But when they are of so careless and independent a disposition that they will quarrel with their own bread, one is tempted to let them take their own course, which is in the end their undoing." He paused for a moment and stroked his jaw, as was his habit, while I smiled behind my hand and resolved to let him take his own way. "Why," he resumed, "one man is known to me who has in his keeping a thing that's worth a dozen fortunes, yet I'll be sworn he knows not how to extract therefrom the wealth and power that all men so covet. 'Slife! 'tis a pity! And yet he is possessed of great courage, skill and wit. One can but admire such a man; but after cool consideration, he's blamable, yes, upon my soul, 'tis a waste!" And the Earl brought down his clenched right hand upon his knee, by way of emphasis.

"I rejoice to see that your sword-arm has recovered, my Lord," I smiled.

"'Tis but injured for fence; for social purposes 'tis quite sound," he returned carelessly.

"But this person of whom you speak—is there no one that will instruct him as to how he should use this all-powerful knowledge?" I was leading him on.

"'Twere dangerous, I warrant, to offer him a suggestion. But if I were his friend, I should advise him to hold his secret fast, and not permit a word of it to pass his lips."

"Zooks! my Lord, but this must be a most strange secret. You say that with his knowledge he can purchase wealth and power, and yet he may not impart this secret to another. I confess, 'tis beyond my comprehension."

The Earl smiled knowingly. Then he faced me, and in a low and confidential tone went on: "You see, this brave and witty, but uncautious, soldier holds a secret that, he thinks, would compromise a person of high standing, who enjoys the friendship of the King, were he to impart this knowledge to his Majesty."

"Whereas——" I put in.

"Precisely. You are a gentleman of perception, as well as of courage, Sir. Whereas, as you say, the King would give the tale no credence; and, instead of rewarding this most courageous gentleman, would cast him off as the slanderer of his friend." He paused and watched my face anxiously, his long, white fingers stroking his pointed chin slowly, yet uneasily.

"Granted. What follows?"

"Besides thus losing the favour of the King, this gentleman would make an enemy of his Majesty's friend, who, for some time past, has wielded an

influence that is in strength the second in the land,—an influence ever increasing.

"Yes, yes, my Lord,—but the alternative,—this road to wealth and power?"

"Ah!" he smiled, with sparkling eyes, "now we come to a vastly different picture,—a picture in colours as bright as those of the other are dark,—a canvas of broader dimensions, and one more happy of contemplation."

I bowed and leaned forward, for he spoke very low and glanced around through the gathering shadows, to make sure that no third person was there.

"Should this gentleman, this soldier of whom we are speaking, choose another course—the alternative, as you say—he would still retain the good will of the King, to whom he has rendered faithful service, and besides, make a friend of this nobleman, who otherwise would be his enemy. This, then, opens up a career for the holder of this little secret—a career to the possibilities of which there is practically no limitation."

"You use strong terms, my Lord."

"Yet not more strong than the ability of the King's friend to fulfil his promises."

"And the promises?—I mean in plain terms."

"There are many high offices at Court, all of which mean a life of luxury and power. But if the tastes of this soldier should not run in this channel, why then, there are some fine estates within the gift

of the Crown. I know of one, at least, that is worth three thousand a year. But I only name this as an example. There are many, very many, alternatives, Master Everard, that one in high favour may take."

"And would it not seem strange, even to this blunt soldier, that his little secret should be of such worth, my Lord? Might not the thought occur to him that if it was of so much consequence to the King's friend that this secret should be kept, it must have a power to harm the nobleman, if it should be told? Then, my Lord, when this curiosity is once aroused, he would doubtless think that the King's friend has some deeper object than lavish generosity in paying so high a price for so little a thing? In other words, he might think that the other has need of his services."

"'Od's fish, Sir! you are a master of discernment. You have struck the nail upon the head. There is a little service that the King's friend would like to have done him, but 'tis so small that I had overlooked it. Faith, when one comes to examine it closely, it proves to be nothing more than that the soldier will attend to his own business. In other words, as you say, all that is required of him is that he leave the place where he now is, and journey to —say—London, where he will be pleased to remain for a few days." He leaned back in his seat and watched me through half-closed lids. Then he laughed a little forcedly. "'Tis a mighty small condition to attach to so great a reward, upon my

soul. I cannot understand any sane man even stopping to consider,—especially when its rejection means the withdrawal of all reward, and the enmity of the King's friend." He ended the threat very deliberately, still stroking his chin on every word.

"And this enmity of the King's friend,—what is its consequence?"

"In this case, it is equivalent to death."

"But there are others to whom the secret is known."

"Quite so; but those persons—for reasons known to me—are unable to impart it to another."

"So this blunt soldier is a person of some importance?"

"You mistake me, Sir. 'Tis the absence of this courageous gentleman that is of such importance. Quite a different matter, is it not, Sir? And his absence can be assured in two ways."

The coolness of the scoundrel aroused a kind of admiration within me,—an admiration for his daring insolence—though at the same time I had to keep a curb on my anger, lest I should break loose and spit the knave as he sat watching me with a smile of careless tolerance, while in his speech he assured me of my fate in case I should not sell my honour to him.

I sat silent for a moment, then said: "You have told me that my services to the King are at an end. Have you an order from his Majesty?"

He drew forth a packet and handed it to me in silence.

There was not sufficient light now to read by, so I did not break the seal.

"You have not yet expressed your opinion as to the opportunities of this soldier, Sir," says the Earl, as I arose and started for the path.

"No, my Lord; for there are times when the tongue is too weak for the purpose, and yet we have reasons for not using a sharper instrument. However, since you ask, I will say this: If I were the supposed soldier of whom we were speaking, and you should chance to be the other—the King's friend,—and you were to offer me the rewards you named, and on the same conditions, I should have a great struggle with myself to keep from spitting you for a damned knave, to whom honour is unknown." I faced him fairly as I spoke and thrust my jaw within a foot of his, and when I had finished, put my hand upon my hilt, that he might have no excuse for hesitation.

He stared back at me savagely for a moment, then burst into a mocking laugh.

"Ha! ha! I might have known! Sir Alfred's not such a fool after all, Sir! Ha! ha! how laughable! Well, well, you have yourself to thank. I would have saved you, in return for the service you have done me in defeating the plans of Monmouth's puppy—Sir Charles Rawley—; but you will not have it so."

"Yes," I said through clenched teeth, "I defeated the plans of the puppy;—I shall do likewise with those of the dog!"

His hand flew to his hilt, but he did not draw. "My arm is not yet sound, Master Brigand. Abide, abide, Sir;—your fate is sealed."

I kept an eye on him, and side by side we walked toward the house. Then he halted suddenly, turned quickly, and looked back. I did likewise. All was still, and the path clear, though I heard a sound as of a stealthy footstep. I well knew what it was, and could picture that death-like face behind the hedge. Then on the other side of the path I heard a rustling sound, which quickly died out in the distance. I twisted my mustaches over it, but could make nothing of it.

On the last terrace before the house Cadwaller again stopped. "So you are resolved to remain here?" he asked.

"Until I have a mind to leave, Master Spaniel."

He laughed. "Then you will dance at my wedding?" he sneered.

"I make no engagements for the next world. 'Tis a superstition I have, my Lord."

His sneer became broader, and his laugh more malicious. "'Slife!" he said slowly, "Sir Alfred has had his eyes open. Ha! ha! Bottom, by Heaven! But remember, Master Bottom, you may play one part only. And for that part you have been cast."

"A dream—only a dream, good Spaniel!"

"Rot me! but I will make it a reality."

"But in this dream of yours, Master Menial—ah, Spaniel, I mean—you must lend me your head."

He was about to make reply, but at that moment Sir Alfred came forth hastily, so the Earl stepped forward to meet him.

Our host was excited. "Strike me dead, my Lord, but things have come to a pretty pass!" cried he.

"How now, Sir Alfred—what's amiss?"

"My authority seems to have vanished. Not a trace can I find of my daughter, my Lord. Spit me! but she defies me past endurance. And both you gentlemen heard me order her to her room! I trust, my Lord, you will overlook these annoyances for my sake; but I confess——"

Cadwaller burst out a-laughing. "Why, Sir Alfred, the lass is but playing a sly trick! There, she but now stepped back from that window. Come, come, Sir Alfred, you must not take a maiden with too great a seriousness."

"Ah!" sighed Sir Alfred, as he hooked his arm into that of his Lordship, "I shall feel relieved of a great responsibility when all is settled, my Lord. Not because I have no love for my daughter—think not that for a moment—quite the contrary, I assure you; but, you see, she understands not the gravity of my position, and consequently she keeps me in a state of great anxiety, lest some of her caprices

should not be interpreted aright by you, my Lord."

"Ha! ha! have no fear, my dear Sir Alfred. Faith, I understand women."

"And rats, my Lord?" I put in.

"Now damn you! your insolence is unbearable!" he cried, starting to draw.

"Nay, nay, my Lord!" put in Sir Alfred. "No quarreling now!" Then he whispered something in the other's ear. "And you, Master Everard, be at peace with his Lordship. Come, we all must be good friends to-night, for Master Everard leaves us in the morning, I hear."

"You shall have time to bid me adieu, Sir," I shrugged, and strolled into the house.

CHAPTER X.

In the hall I broke the seal of the parchment given me by the Earl, and read. 'Twas a royal command, which ordered me to release the persons of Sir Alfred Heron and his daughter from arrest, to betake myself to London, where I should report to the King at Whitehall, after his return from Dover.

"Dover!" I muttered. "So the King already is at Dover!" Then I again looked at the date, and noticed that the order was four days old. "Ha! why this delay?" I wondered. "Strange that so determined a villain as Cadwaller would delay after having the King's order. Well, well, there must be a reason. . . . What? I wonder—what?" I refolded the order and put it in my pocket, turned—and faced Mistress Heron, who stood watching me with anxious eyes.

"What is it?" she almost whispered, glancing toward the door apprehensively.

"An order from the King, which bids me to release my prisoners and betake myself to London. 'Tis dated at Dover, four days since."

"Quick—in here." She led the way into the room in which the stormy conversation between Sir

Alfred and her, on the morning Sir Charles returned to London, had taken place. She crossed to the window and peeped out. "They still are talking. Now, why did you fight him?"

"Fight him?—when?" I puzzled.

She shook her finger at me. "Come, be truthful. Why—did—you—fight—him?"

I twisted my mustaches perplexedly, wondering what she could know of it.

"I have not had time to speak to Julius," she smiled.

"But—how——?"

"Yes, yes, I saw and heard all, Sir. And I had asked you not to quarrel with him!" she reproved.

"So that was the rustling I heard when returning!"

"Yes. I feared that something of the kind would happen, so I followed. Ah! you are incorrigible." She sighed, but smiled as she turned away.

"But I merely defended myself."

"A school-boy's excuse!" she mocked. "But, I confess, I enjoyed it."

"And I too, though I lost my temper at the last."

She smiled, then became grave with the next breath. "But what do you intend to do?"

"When?"

"Now, Sir, now! I mean about going to London."

"Well, Madam, I have not yet even thought of it."

"But—but will you go?" Her voice faltered a little.

"Only when you command."

"But the King?"

"The King is occupied at Dover."

"Yes, yes; but his order?"

"Were he here, I should feel inclined to send the same message to him as I sent to the Earl."

Her face showed great anxiety, but when I said this, she half laughed.

"But tell me," she said, after a moment's pause, "why you frown so. Have I—have I displeased you?"

"No, no, Madam—far from it! You could not displease me! You—you—No, you have not displeased me." I broke off abruptly and strode to the window.

They still were talking, but as I looked they slowly started toward the door.

I turned to the lady. "Remember, Madam, what I already have said: show no sign that will tell this knave that you fear him."

"No," she replied bravely,—though she did not look at me.

"And when you have entered your chamber to-night, lock the door, and open to none—not even to your father or your maid—until morning."

"No."

"I expect no danger to-night, Madam; but 'tis well to take every precaution."

"Yes." She looked up for an instant, then, as I passed into the hall, she turned to the window.

I scarcely had time to hasten to a chair beside the table and assume a careless attitude, when they entered, still talking confidentially.

Sir Alfred seemed surprised to find me there, but the Earl passed on with scarce a look, and started up the stairs. At the first landing he turned. "I shall be ready in a moment, Sir Alfred," he said.

"Very well, my Lord," the other returned, bowing and rubbing one hand over the other.

I could hear our host giving orders for the serving of supper.

A few moments later, when I stepped forth from my room, I came face to face with his Lordship.

"Did you read the King's command?" he asked, civilly enough.

"I did."

"And?" he questioned.

"'Tis something old in date, my Lord."

I watched the effect of my words. He looked uneasy, I'll be sworn; but he was too clever a knave to reveal much by his expression.

"Yes?" he sneered.

"Yes, my Lord; and will need repeating ere I take the responsibility of acting on it."

"And may I ask why?"

"Circumstances may have changed since 'twas

written, my Lord. "Yea, I'll be sworn they have changed."

"You are very vague, Sir."

"You see, my Lord, there are many hands in this game; the stakes are considerable; the play rapid."

"I do not follow you, my dear Sir."

"No? Well, to be brief, one cannot run the chance of staking on an old deal. I have lost the fire of extreme youth, so play with a quiet caution."

"You play a fool's game, Sir, and speak in riddles."

"You hold a hand in the game, my Lord."

He shrugged his shoulders; and together we went down the stairs to supper.

As we reached the lower hall, Sir Alfred and his daughter came forth from the room in which I had left her. The face of the former was flushed and angry, of the latter, pale and determined. But at the sight of the Earl, Sir Alfred mastered his anger, and, smiling and bowing, led the way to the supper-room.

'Twas a strange company we made. The Earl tried to ignore all that had passed, but there was an anxiety and restlessness about him that I had not observed before; and after several fruitless attempts to start a conversation with Mistress Heron, he lapsed into a sullen silence, from which even our host's attempts at wit could not draw him. Sir Alfred was embarrassed by the manner of his Lordship, and soon followed the other's example.

This made the quartette almost speechless; for Mistress Heron and I said barely a word from first to last—she ignoring all remarks addressed to her, and I keeping silent that I might the better form my plans. Doubtless the Earl had a reason similar to my own, for several times I caught him looking intently at me from under his brows, with a sort of puzzled expression.

"It seems as though I made a good guess when I suggested that circumstances have changed since the King's order was dated," I thought. "What, what, I wonder, is taking place at Dover. Something that does not please the King's friend over well, I warrant." Then the Little Duke came to my mind. "His Lordship seems to lack confidence in something. I wonder if he fears that Monmouth will succeed in overthrowing him, during his absence. That order, four days old. . . . Ha! something very urgent prevented his delivering it. Now, what that something was must be discovered. But how—how? Ha! I must ask the Little Duke. I now regret that I offended him that night at the inn. And there is Sir Charles, too, his man, my enemy. Yes, yes, I must see Monmouth, and he will explain these mysteries to me. And if he will not—ah! why then,—he must. I see now—the Earl is uneasy; wherefore he will not wish to be long separated from the King. I must act the quicker, then. I first shall talk with this old fool—which I know will be useless,—then I must move

quickly. Ha! ha! my Lord, I believe you have betrayed yourself, just by that uneasiness over so little a thing as the date of an order. Zooks! you are a handsome knave. Now, if I had that face, without the sneer, I might——" I broke off my musing, for—for my mind was running away from the plan I was forming.

As we rose from the table, Sir Alfred, after a glance at me, turned to his daughter and said sternly: "You will kindly withdraw now to your room, and will not again leave it to-night."

She bit her lip at the insult, but turned without a word and did as directed.

Cadwaller looked inquiringly at Sir Alfred; the other nodded, and the two started toward the hall, giving me no more attention than if I had not existed.

"Sir Alfred," I said, as they reached the door.

He stopped and looked back with insulting surprise, and answered nothing.

"I must speak with you," I added.

He whispered something to Cadwaller, then turned back with a look of impatience.

I stepped to the door and closed it behind his Lordship, then went to the other, which I opened, to see that no servant was near. After again closing this, I turned to my unwilling host.

"Sir Alfred," I said quietly, "I intend to speak to you in very plain terms."

"'Tis a habit you have, Sir, and springs from your ignorance," he answered roughly.

"Be that as it may, Sir, so I shall speak to you."

"Then make haste, and presume not too far on my patience." Sir Alfred had discovered a great courage since his Lordship's arrival.

"I have heard you say twice that your daughter shall be married to Lord Cadwaller, and yet she detests him, and has assured you that she never will consent to the alliance."

"You accursed meddler!" he cried, "do you expect me to listen to such presumption?" He made a move as though to pass me.

"Wait, Sir Alfred," I said quietly, but firmly, at the same time stepping directly in front of him; "you shall hear what I have to say. When I have done, you may leave at your pleasure."

"Oh, indeed!—may I? How very kind!"

"That depends upon your then intentions. It may prove to be a cruelty."

He looked as though he might explode with indignation; but he did nothing but take snuff impatiently.

"Now, Sir Alfred," I continued, "I gave you credit for taking the course that you have taken, partly through ignorance of what your daughter's fate will be in case you succeed in carrying out your base proposal."

He seemed ready to fall down in a fit from anger, but he stood still, glaring at me with bulging eyes, his nostrils expanded like those of a war-horse.

"Come, Sir, I shall show you that which evidently has escaped your eye in this much mixed matter. In the first place, you became alarmed because of the King's attentions to your daughter. You resolved that she should leave the Court, but feared the King's strong opposition. The Duke of Monmouth, for reasons that are best known to himself, came to your rescue. He proposed the abduction, and Lord Cadwaller most kindly consented to assist you. But many other plots and counterplots were working,—but into these we need not go, as their work is now accomplished, and their results are sufficient to require all my attention."

"You are tiresome, Sir, and only show me how far my daughter has fallen, when she takes a common adventurer into her confidence." His voice shook with rage, but he spoke in low tones, as though he did not wish the Earl to overhear what he said.

"Now, Sir, I wish you to follow me closely. You consider your daughter's honour in danger because of the King. Lord Cadwaller is the King's most intimate friend—you follow me, Sir?—and you would marry your daughter to his Lordship."

The door behind me opened; I turned; there stood the Earl upon the threshold, an evil smile about his lips.

"You are too patient, Sir Alfred," he said, as he entered and closed the door. "Faith, the head of this fellow has been turned by your consideration. Give him but another day, and he'll say what changes he desires to be made in your household. 'Od's fish! he's so sure of his ownership here that one knows not what next to expect. Tell me, Sir Alfred, which of you gentlemen is now my host—I would know to whom I'm indebted for my entertainment." And he took a step back and bowed deeply to me.

Sir Alfred stood speechless. He glared unspeakable hate at me; and when Cadwaller spoke, he seemed to hear him not. His face was purple, the veins of his neck and temples stood out like whipcords, and his hand clutched at his band to relieve the strain. I feared for his life, so stepped to a window and swung it open. As I did so, the sound of the bell at the porter's lodge quivered very faintly on the night. I glanced quickly at the Earl and Sir Alfred, but no sign did either show of having heard it. The former was staring fixedly at the latter, who still stood holding his band from his short, thick neck. Then our host put his hand to his head, and moved unsteadily to the door.

"Come,—my Lord, come—with me," he muttered Together they passed out, crossed the hall, and entered the room from which he and his daughter had come forth to supper.

There was no sound from beyond this door for

some moments, then the heavy, uneven step that I knew to be Sir Alfred's began pacing back and forth. I listened for the sound of voices, but they did not come. Then I remembered the bell. It seemed to carry in its mystic voice a message—mayhap a threat. I went up the stairs quietly and got my hat. Returning, I halted by the door of the room in which the two knaves were. Sir Alfred was talking excitedly, in short and broken sentences, interrupted by the soft, insinuating voice of Cadwaller. Their words were killed by the heavy door—'twas but a murmur I heard.

"And now, to be the first to greet the late visitor," I muttered, and stepped forth into the bright moonlight.

CHAPTER XI.

At the branch in the main drive I halted and listened. No sound came from the direction of the gates. "Strange," I thought. "They have had ample time to come the distance, if they were admitted. If they did not get in, the bell would have told me." Again I listened carefully. This time I thought I heard a sound as of a horse's feet upon the bridge. Yes, there it was, very faint, coming from the right through the trees as a whisper. I turned from the path and started toward the little bridge at which Mistress Heron fed her fishes. 'Twas necessary to go with great caution, for evidently the visitor was attemptng to escapeobservation, or he would not have chosen so indirect a path. As I approached the bridge, I stopped several times and strained my ears to catch a sound. Not the faintest movement could I hear. I stepped into the little path and, stooping, searched for a footprint. By the moonlight one could see almost as distinctly as by day. . . . There in the fine gravel were the marks of the horse's feet. I tried to follow them, but the shadows thrown by the trees across the path made this

impossible. I calculated the time since I had heard him upon the bridge. To me it seemed about five minutes. "Very well," I muttered, "in five minutes he could reach the house. He is there now. . . ." I started up the path. I had taken but a score of paces, when a small bird came fluttering uncertainly toward me, dodging from one side to the other, searching in the unaccustomed light for a safe hiding-place. It flew almost against me—then, with a little squeak, swung gracefully into the protecting leaves of a bush at the path-side.

"Ha! my little friend, so you are frightened." I stopped and glanced around. "Now, what could have alarmed you so greatly? 'Tis late, I swear, for you sail thus abroad. And 'tis but this moment you were awakened so rudely, for you would not travel far, methinks, in this strange, mystic light." Another flutter of wings, and a second little feathered thing dived into the bushes at the other side. "Zooks! I must be a great attraction, my friends. Another, and yet another! What! do you still come? Oh, ho! there must be some campaign against you. Very well; just step under my wing, and fear nothing. I soon shall be called the father of Kent. Zounds! I seem to be the only man here not bent on destruction. Your hands seem determined to be full of trouble, Mark Everard; even the birds fly to you for safety. You have not enough to look after already, but you needs must find more. Trouble!

Ha! ha! I like it—'tis my life. But this time it is different. It hurts, this time—it hurts."

I walked on with bowed head, forgetful of the birds. There was a subtle something somewhere—it seemed in the air, or the moonbeams—that brought a strange, half-sadness to me. 'Twas something of the nature of the gloomy spells that had laid hold on me since I had come to Heron Hall; but not so melancholy—it had a strange sweetness about it that made me not wish to shake it off. I soon was lost completely in my thoughts. The incident of the frightened birds, which I had resolved to trace to its source, was forgotten. I wandered aimlessly on, my hands behind me, and my eyes fixed on the little, winding strip of gravel. Sometimes I stopped to stare off through the moonlight, or to gasp in the cool, pure, flower-scented air; sometimes I halted by a bush of blooms, and scattered petals on the ground, with thoughts far from my occupation. And all the while my mind ran on through unaccustomed dreams. There was some strange spell upon me—a spell of peace and good-will. 'Twas a witchery of the night. 'Twas soft and calm and sweet. But somewhere in it was a taste of gall—a subtle something that gnawed most slyly at the heart, and made the throat to ache. 'Twas a great calm storm—a meeting of opposing forces, that made no move, for each endured the strain. Within me 'twas as the night without—a grand stillness, that throbbed with some unknown and pent-up force.

How long my dream lasted, I cannot tell, but it must have been some considerable time, for when I awoke the moon was much farther up the sky than when I had stood by the little bridge. I was standing with my back against a tree, and gazing at a window on the second floor of the house. The curtain was raised, and I imagined—nay, I was sure—I saw a small, white face looking out into the moonlight. It moved a little, once or twice, as though changing the resting-place of the chin from one hand to the other. Then the face vanished,—and it was at this moment I awakened with a hand upon my shoulder.

"Hush, Sir!" whispered a familiar voice in my ear.

"What is it?"

"Step back into the shadows more, Sir, and be very quiet,—they are but a few yards away."

Holding my scabbard close to my side, that it might not knock against anything, I followed Toby to where scarcely a moonbeam could struggle through the foliage. As I tiptoed after the little man, the memory of the gate-bell, the horse crossing the bridge, and the frightened birds, came to me as a shock, and I stood a moment scratching my head and inwardly cursing myself for my lunacy. Such a piece of gross carelessness never had happened before. "You are mad, Mark Everard,—you have lost what little brains you ever had," I muttered angrily. "How many

times is Toby to catch you in the act of making a fool of yourself? This is the third." I pulled my mustaches in annoyance, and glared at my companion in the darkness—and made no doubt that in his sleeve he was laughing at me.

"Who is it?" I whispered presently.

"I don't know for a certainty, Sir, I was just getting within earshot of them when I spied you, Sir. I feared they also might see you, so I stole round them and came to where you stood."

"How did you chance to see them?"

"Julius came to the door of the men's room and, after taking quite a time to waken them without disturbing my dreams, got admittance. I hadn't undressed yet, Sir, so was ready and waiting to follow so soon as they left. Well, Sir, pretty soon the door opened very quietly, and two of them tiptoed down the hall. They took an awful time to pass my door and to get to the other end of the passage. So soon as they had gone down the stairs, I followed, with my boots in my hand. I waited at the door until they entered the shade of the trees, and then followed."

"Who went out with that toad Julius?"

"I'm not sure which one of the men, Sir, but I think from his walk it was Denton."

"Yes, yes; and where did they go?"

"I had some trouble to follow them, Sir, without being seen. I lost them once or twice, and at last nearly stumbled over them. They were talking to

someone else; but as I was creeping nearer, the stranger said something to Julius, and he crawled away toward the little bridge,—you know, Sir, where we went the first morning."

I tried to get a look at Toby's face, but the shadows were too deep.

"Yes, Julius sneaked off—and then?" I asked, a little impatiently.

"Oh, yes, Sir. Then Denton and the stranger went on talking in almost whispers, and I was just getting near enough to catch a word here and there, when I saw you, Sir, walking back and forth near the edge of the trees. I feared they would see you, Sir, so when I saw you lean against the tree, and start looking at the house——"

"Yes, yes, Toby—I know the rest," I broke in.

"Yes, Sir—of course, Sir." He pulled his hat a little over his eyes.

"Now where are they?"

"Yonder, Sir—about three score yards from here."

"Lead on, then."

We took about a score of paces, then I halted Toby and, after getting from him the exact position in which this mysterious stranger and Denton were conversing, directed him to take a circuitous route, that he might approach them from the opposite side. Without this precaution, there was a danger of their making off at the first sound. I allowed Toby what

I considered sufficient time to get into position, then proceeded cautiously in the direction indicated. From tree to tree I glided, keeping in the shadows as much as possible, when compelled to cross an open space. At every stop I listened for the sound of voices. I counted every step, that I might not pass them in the darkness.

"There," I said at last, "but twenty paces more, according to Toby's calculations, which usually are about right."

I listened breathlessly for a moment. Not a sound. Then, after peering into the shadows in all directions, and seeing nothing, I tiptoed softly to the shade of a large tree some half-dozen yards ahead.

"There must be no *ifs* about it. I say he must not be permitted to leave." The voice was raised in anger, though still under some restraint.

The reply reached me as a murmur.

"That is your affair, Denton," the first speaker continued. "The coach. . . . Horses. . . . Any way you can. . . . Must be detained."

"Now I wonder if I figure in your plans, Sir," I thought, working my way a little nearer.

They were but ten paces from me when I halted this time. I could see their forms plainly, as they stood beneath a great tree, for on the other side a great patch of moonlight lay upon the grass, against which they stood out darkly.

"Hark! what was that?" They stood listening a moment.

"I think 'twas a bird, Sir."

Silence again.

"Well, I have told you all, I think. Make sure that you are not seen when you return to your room. That little devil, Toby, is a sly one, and 'tis impossible to say how Everard would act, were he to discover our object. I must now be off. Remember,—detain him as long as possible. You shall hear from me soon."

He started to cross the patch of moonlight. In the centre he stopped, drew out his timepiece, and turned so that the light fell upon it.

"Eleven," he said, as though to himself. "Two hours to Dover. Get back to bed, Denton; you may have to be stirring early. Good-night, my man,—and remember what I have told you." He gave his hat a little jerk forward and strode off.

I whistled sharply. The man, with an exclamation, sprang back a little and drew his sword. At the same instant an oath rolled out at the other side of the moonlight. Then came a gruff "Drop that!" from Toby, followed immediately by the click of angry steel.

"Don't hurt him, Toby!" I shouted, stepping from my concealment.

"Oh, no, Sir! we're only playing, Sir. The gentleman wants exercise," he laughed.

Denton sprang forward and lunged. Zooks! the fellow almost had me, for I was giving more heed to Toby and Sir Charles than to my antagonist. Faith, I had not drawn when his blade shot past me as I sprang aside.

"'Slife! would you draw steel against your officer, then? Sheath that sword, or I'll spit you!"

His reply was another lunge, more vicious than the first. I put it aside, slid my hilt against his, that he could not disengage, and dealt him a heavy blow under the ear with my left fist. He was a stout fellow, and did not go down, but he staggered back a few steps, half-stunned, his point upon the ground. Ere he could recover, I knocked his blade from his hand.

"I've a mind to carve you as I would a capon!" I said. "Is there no loyalty in your stupid head? Did you not know me?" I wished to leave him an excuse.

"Oh! your pardon, Sir. I—didn't know you, I—I thought it was someone else—the—the Earl," he stammered.

A man of resource, upon my soul! was this Denton. Doubtless he knew my hatred of Cadwaller, and so took occasion to profit by it.

I said nothing further, but turned to watch Sir Charles and his agile little adversary. Denton followed my example, but held his hand to his jaw the while.

"Be sure not to injure him, Toby," I again cautioned, as I saw how hot was the pace.

"No, Sir; we've tips on our foils, Sir," he chuckled.

Sir Charles handled his blade as one well taught. His thrusts and guards were too regular and machine-like, however, for they bespoke the apt pupil rather than the master of the steel. Had he been opposed to an ordinarily good swordsman, he could more than have held his own—yea, much more; but with Toby he was as a child against a giant,—the little man but played with him. Toby fought with an ease and seeming carelessness that can be acquired only by years of experience and an independent mind. 'Twas mechanical art opposed to a perfect art that had become a habit more than a thing controlled by a rule or reason. Sir Charles was fighting to save himself from humiliation at the hand of a presuming servant. Toby fought for the pure love of fighting. To him 'twas but a splendid diversion after long days of inactivity. As he fought he laughed and made most ludicrous remarks that seemed to drive the other to madness. He was having such sport that I had not the heart to interfere, for I had no love for Sir Charles, and made no doubt that a piece lopped off his dignity would be more improvement than loss.

"Ha! ha! well done! but a little late! Yes, that was better, but too low! Very bad indeed, Sir! If

you leave another opening like that, I must take advantage of it, Sir! Ha! ha!" he laughed, as their hilts crashed above their heads, "too savage and wild! Your point went straight through a poor moonbeam!"

Sir Charles swore through his teeth, then flung his hat behind him, and re-engaged with redoubled fury.

"Now, now, you must not be so reckless, Sir! You may hurt yourself despite me!" Toby gave ground, that he might not be forced to draw blood. "That was very wrong, Sir;—you should have doubled! Always remember, Sir, a double is a very good thing. Now, now, you really must keep back, or you shall impale yourself! There!—so I told you! You see, if I hadn't raised my point, you now should be gasping for Heaven!"

I now saw the necessity of stopping the play, for the pace was so furious that, as Toby said, the Baronet was running a great chance of being wounded, simply because his rage had robbed him of any reason he might at other times have possessed.

"Come, Sir," I said, approaching, "stop this at once!"

Sir Charles in reply gasped out an oath.

"Then disarm him, Toby, if he knows not when he is beaten."

A second later a sword struck the ground at my feet, and the Baronet stood glaring at Toby, his

shoulders rising and falling quickly, as he gasped for breath. Toby's sword was in its scabbard, his heels together and his hand at his side, head erect and soldierly, with nothing in his appearance that would suggest the recent encounter.

"Well, Sir Charles, so we meet again, as you said; but I'm surprised at your apparent haste to leave. Why, why so warlike? Do you come from the King this time, or from—from his Grace? By your actions I should take it to be the latter. Come, declare yourself! Friend or foe?"

He glanced around until his eye fell upon Denton. "Oh! so you are a prisoner, too, my friend," he said. Then he again turned to me. "I come to-night as neither friend nor foe of yours, Master Everard, and therefore cannot understand your conduct in spying upon me and committing this great outrage."

"There has been no outrage, Sir. An unknown person came secretly to this place, which I am guarding, and held a conference with one of my men. The stranger was challenged; he drew against the sentry, was overpowered and asked to explain his presence. Quite simple, you see, and far from outrage."

The words I had overheard: "He must not be permitted to leave. . . . Coach. . . . Horses. . . . Any way you can," ran quickly through my mind. Looking at them now, since he had said he came as

neither friend nor foe of mine, I thought I understood them.

"Toby, return Sir Charles Rawley his sword, and you and this man withdraw until I call you," I said, after a few moments of silence.

When they were gone Sir Charles picked up his hat and stood facing me, his manner suggesting defiance.

"Now, Sir Charles, if you are not my enemy, will you explain your presence?"

"I did not say I was not your enemy," he replied bluntly. "I did not come here to-night as your enemy, was what I told you."

"Quite so; but that has no bearing on the question. I ask you, if you did not come as my enemy, what is your reason for all this mystery?"

"Why should I take you into my confidence, after you have insulted me by every means within your power?" I could see by the way he spoke that at heart he wished to tell me the secret.

"Because you are a gentleman of good understanding, to be sure, Sir Charles. If your plans are not meant to oppose mine, you have the chance of securing a good ally, and whether I undertake to co-operate with you or not, you assure yourself of your liberty. Two very excellent reasons for your confidence, are they not, my dear Sir Charles?"

He remained silent a moment longer, then came a little nearer and said: "After consideration, I can

see no reason you should have for opposing me. You see, Sir, there are many forces at work, of which you know nothing." He looked very wise, and paused to let me realise my insignificance.

"Doubtless there are many, as you say." I tried to look a little awed.

"Of course you have discovered that Sir Alfred has been used as a blind to hide a deeper game. You saw that before I returned to London."

I nodded.

"You mistook the part that I was playing. You thought me to be in league with Cadwaller, did you not?"

"I had not then decided, but knew you were opposed to the interests of Sir Alfred."

"Quite so, though, remember, I have no ill-will for Sir Alfred personally. He was but an obstacle in my path." He straightened himself and again paused for effect.

I smiled in the shadow of my hat, and said nothing.

"Well, Sir, there was a real plot to abduct the Queen; and in that plot even Lord Cadwaller played but a secondary part." His voice here dropped to a whisper. "There were men behind it that practically rule England. But remember, Sir, the King had naught to do with it. He has faults, but he never would stoop to such injustice. I am not permitted to divulge their names yet, and they may never be made public, or the crime brought home to

the ringleaders, for they have seen to it that their tracks are well covered. But with Cadwaller 'tis different, I think. There is a chance—'tis only a chance—that evidence may be produced that will convince the King of his guilt. His greatest enemies—*my friends*—are working against him with all their power. But he has so great an influence with the King that 'tis desirable to keep him from Dover so long as is possible. 'Twas this I told Denton. Yes, if he can be detained here for a few days longer, there is a chance of his overthrow; for the King soon can forget, especially in such company as he has at Dover."

"And these men,—are they trusty?"

"Perfectly. If I tell Denton to obey your orders, they will do so."

"I overheard you say to him something about a coach and horses. What was it?"

"I told him to tamper with the coach, so that it would break down, or with the horses, that he cannot ride,—to do anything that will prevent the Earl from travelling."

"Ah, yes; but his Lordship looks like a man that would be hard to defeat in cunning. Does he know of this attraction at Dover that may rob him of the King's favour?"

"Oh, yes, and fully realises his danger! Sun, strike me! but he almost feared to leave the King's side to come here, I'll warrant."

"And the attraction,—what is it?"

Sir Charles laughed. "That that always attracts the King most—a woman."

"Ah, a new one! When did she come upon the scene?"

"But four days since. She is in the train of the King's sister, the Duchess of Orleans—that is, she came in the train of the Duchess."

"Oh, ho! I see!"

"A gift right royal, upon my soul!" he laughed.

"Four days since she came, you say?"

"Yes."

I twisted my mustaches in silence for a moment. What Sir Charles told me fitted in nicely with the King's order, four days old. It explained also the anxiety on the part of the Earl to make sure that I should offer him no opposition. Before this, I had thought it strange that one so secure in the King's favour should think it necessary that I should keep close silence. He saw his danger and realised that no time could be spared for the overcoming of any opposition I might make. But now he knew I could not be bought. His every moment was precious. It was evident he would lose no time in defeating me. I must be more than ever on my guard—his Lordship would force the pace.

"From what I have said," resumed Sir Charles, "it must be clear to you that Cadwaller's strongest chance of defeating us lies in the speed with which

he returns Mistress Heron to the Court. He has gained Sir Alfred's pardon from the King. With this he will buy the daughter, and with the daughter he will repurchase any prestige he may lose during his absence."

"Oh, will he?" I thought, and ground an oath between my teeth. Aloud I said: "But what object have I in defeating the plans of the Earl?"

He looked uneasy for a moment. "I believe you have an object, Master Everard," he said, then laughed lightly.

I watched him, but he only smiled knowingly, and took a pinch of snuff. His manner brought to my mind another strange thing.

"And how comes it, Sir Charles, that you have no fear that that fellow Julius will betray you?"

He looked embarrassed, took another pinch of snuff, and then, deciding on his course, laughed softly. "I thought you were missing that point. You are right—I have a suspicion of your object, and have no fear that Julius will betray me. I may say no more, but I think you understand me."

"Ah! you own Julius, then? I now better understand many little things."

"Do you, now?" he laughed. "'Tis very unwise to take so much for granted, Sir. And there is one thing I would have you remember:"—he drew closer and lowered his voice—"you have yet to answer to me personally for your insults. In this

other matter we may work for a common end; but I have no desire to stand in a false light, and have you think me your friend."

I admired the boy for his frankness, though I was disposed to laugh at his threat.

"Do you think it wise to warn me?"

"I think I know my man," he nodded.

I laughed. "Zooks! Sir Charles, you have developed a great wisdom since last we met. Yes, you are right—you know your man."

"Then you agree to ally yourself with us?"

"Yes,—up to a certain point. When my object shall have been accomplished, I shall drop out; and then—well, after that we shall know how we stand."

"Blood me! but I cannot help liking you, Sir! You should be one of us. There's a great time coming, if the King should do something that he seems inclined to do."

I stopped him with a wave of my hand. "Don't tell too much, Sir Charles, if you hope to succeed in this great time that you speak of. For myself,—I'm but a poor soldier of fortune, without politics or ambition. I have passed the time when I expected dreams to be fulfilled."

He stood looking strangely at me. Then he drew his timepiece. "Twenty minutes to midnight. 'Slife! I must be off!" He again turned to me as though to say something, but evidently changed his mind.

"You intended to speak to your man, Denton," I reminded.

"Oh, yes;—but hark!—who is this?"

The sound of hasty movements came from the deepest shadows, and a moment later Toby appeared, running softly.

I stepped forward to meet him. "Yes, Toby?"

"A mounted man is passing down the little path toward the gate, Sir."

"Where?—Quick!"

Toby sprang toward the path, with Sir Charles and me at his heels. Through the trees we dodged, slanting our course, that we might strike the path as far down as possible. It was very dark here under the great branches. On we stumbled, our progress slow. I cursed as my foot caught on something, and I was thrown to the earth. But the next moment I was somewhat consoled to hear a grunt from Sir Charles, who had flattened himself against an invisible tree. Toby glided through with the skill of a fox, and a moment after the accident to Sir Charles, turned sharply to the left and sprang to the middle of the path, where he stood listening.

"Has he passed?" I whispered.

"I fear so, Sir;—but hark!"

We held our breaths and listened.

"Yes—there he is, crossing the bridge!"

"Quick!" I cried, "we must catch him!"

On the little bridge we again stopped to listen.

. . . A faint rattle came from the gate,—then an indistinct challenge, and a muffled reply.

"Denton is after him!" Toby shouted, as we dashed along.

The sharp, whip-like crack of a pistol rang out on the night. We sprang into the main drive,—and were just in time to see Denton stagger and fall, and a horseman bend low in his saddle and gallop at a furious pace toward Canterbury.

CHAPTER XII.

As we approached the spot where the man lay, he struggled to his feet and came unsteadily toward us. His right hand he pressed to his left shoulder, and between the fingers a little stream of red was trickling.

"Hard hit, my man?" said Sir Charles, supporting him.

"Nay, Sir, 'tis not bad, I think; but the blow upset me. I'm steady now, Sir." He quickly was recovering from the shock.

"Did you recognise the knave?" I asked, removing some of his clothing so as to expose the wound.

"No, Sir, not definitely; but it wasn't the Earl, I think."

"Oh! not his Lordship, but his Lordship's man! As bad, if not worse! Where is that accursed Julius, that he permitted him to pass so quickly? The knave is always in the way when not wanted!"

"I sent him to watch my horse, that it might not neigh," said Sir Charles.

A dark form moved from behind a tree, and, circling noiselessly past us, approached the gate, which it quietly closed. There could be no mistaking the awkward form nor the snake-like movement.

I stood grinding my teeth in the same unaccounta-

ble rage that always came over me when I beheld the hideous creature, while Toby bound a scarf over the furrow that had been ploughed across the top of Denton's shoulder. There was something remarkably strange in this hatred. It meant something . . . I wondered what.

"There, friend Denton, to-morrow you'll be as sound as ever, save for a little stiffness," said Toby, as he finished his operation.

"Don't you think, Sir, we'd better get off the drive?" he asked.

"Zounds, yes!" cried Sir Charles. "That shot would warn Cadwaller! Here, Julius!" (The other sneaked toward him). "Fetch my horse, quick! I must be off. 'Slife!" he went on, to me, as we stepped back under the shadows, "we now must move with double haste,—the Earl has gained a great advantage."

"Yes, he has sent either for more authority or reinforcements—or both."

"And mayhap for something else, as bad as either."

"You mean——?"

"He may be in need of a priest."

"No; a priest would not suffice without the others."

"You mean that you would resist?"

"Resist! Cadwaller may beat me; but if I go under, he shall go too."

He said nothing for a moment,—then: "And yet you have no object!" he laughed. "Well, go on; but our paths soon may cross, I warn you."

"Oh!" I said, and stood silent, pondering a new problem.

"You see I am frank with you."

"I am sleepy," I yawned.

He muttered something under his breath,—then we both remained silent until the sound of a horse's footsteps coming through the trees in the rear told us that Julius was returning.

Sir Charles moved to where the wounded man stood and said a few words in a low tone, then turned to meet Julius. After mounting, he leaned from his saddle and—I made no doubt—gave him whispered directions also. Julius moved off to open the gate. Sir Charles rode up beside me.

"I hope you will be successful in the carrying out of your resolutions, Master Everard—strike me dead if I don't! If you hear from me at all, it shall be soon. Cadwaller has set a mighty fast pace. 'Slife! we must move quickly or be ridden down. Au revoir, Sir. And if we meet not again I shall at least write your epitaph."

He bent low in his saddle, drove spurs into his horse's sides, dashed along the drive and through the gates at full speed.

For some time after he had gone I stood with my back against a tree, staring through the branches at

the starry sky. I heard Julius close the gates, then enter the lodge.

"Toby," I said presently, "return with this man to the house. 'Tis late and you need sleep; to-morrow seems like to be a busy day."

"And you, Sir?" he asked uneasily.

"I? Ah! I shall remain in the grounds awhile."

He turned away unwillingly, then stopped and looked back, twisting his mustaches in indecision.

"Toby!"

"Yes, Sir?"

"What do you think of this affair, Toby?"

"Very bad, Sir, very bad! The worst yet, Sir!"

"Surely not!"

"Well, Sir—that is—ah—the most important."

"You surprise me, Toby! Do you forget our last affair in Paris?"

"No, Sir; but this is very different."

"Yes, different circumstances; but the odds are much the same."

He fidgeted. "Of course Sir Alfred might be managed,—and Sir Charles,—and the Earl,—and—and Julius; but——"

"Oh! but you think the King is one too many for us! Well, you may be right; to-morrow looks dark—yes, faith, very dark."

Toby jerked his hat more over his brows, cleared

his throat and squared his shoulders. "I didn't mean the King, Sir; I meant—ah—meant——"

"Good-night, Toby. You and Denton must have your sleep." I put my hands upon his shoulders and peered into his face. He stared steadily at the ground. I tried to laugh, but the attempt was a sorry failure;—my lips refused to expand smilingly, and my throat ached with the effort to produce the sound.

"Why, Toby," I said presently, "'tis strange indeed to see you become despondent."

"Despondent, Sir!" He sprang back as though I had struck him.

"Ha! that is better, Toby! The old spirit is there still, I see!"

"Ay, Sir, and always will be. But I hate mightily to lose you, Sir." He was looking at the ground again.

Denton had moved off toward the house.

"Lose me?" I asked quietly.

He said nothing for a moment,—then he thrust forward his head. "But the devil take me if she's not worth it, Sir!"

This time I did laugh, scornfully at first, then bitterly, as the true situation was more thoroughly realised.

"If you never lose me until I am lost in that way, Toby, our hairs shall grow white together. Ha!

ha!" I laughed again, and struck my chest, "upon my soul, Toby, you're mad!"'

Toby sadly shook his head.

I grew half-angry, half-alarmed, attempted to laugh again, but failed, and finally ended by twisting my mustaches and boring holes in the ground with the heel of my boot.

Toby stood with hands clasped behind his back, staring off through the patches of moonlight and shadow, a mournful little figure that saw his idolised master and comrade drifting swiftly from him. Zooks! I knew not whether to swear or wipe my eyes. I long had known the little man would lay down his life for me, but I never thought him capable of such foolishness. I fought with the temptation to lose patience, and presently stepped to his side and put my hand upon his shoulder.

He touched his hat smartly and turned to face me. His manner killed the last spark of impatience within me. Zounds! every move of the little man went straight to my heart.

"Come, Toby," I said kindly, "I must show you how groundless is your fear." (I felt like a fool in having to discuss the matter.) "In the first place, think of the King and Cadwaller. They must be defeated or we shall go under—the latter seems the more probable. Next remember Sir Charles, who hopes to be rewarded for the overthrow of his Lord-

ship, as he to-night told me, and warned me to keep out of his path. But so much for him." I snapped my fingers. "After that, think of Sir Alfred, who hates me like the devil, and almost choked with rage when last I spoke to him. . . . A fine array of obstacles, are they not, to assure you that we shall not drift apart! But these, insurmountable as they are, must be placed below the greatest. My dear Toby, but look at me and recall what I always have been. Surely you know me well enough to prevent you from supposing for a moment that I am capable of falling in love with a woman!"

Toby smiled faintly.

"Why, Toby, my boy, I don't know what love is!"

"That's the worst of it, Sir."

"What!"

"That is why you weren't able to keep clear of it, Sir."

"Keep clear of it! Why, man, I have kept clear of it! Zooks! upon my soul, Toby, you're mad! I admit Mistress Heron is the only woman in the world with the power of reason; the only woman with a soul and a man's sense of honour, and a spirit that would fight; the only beautiful woman in the world; the most kind, witty and brave; the only woman in the world not overloaded with vanity and the love of courts; faith, the only real woman I ever have beheld; but to be in love with her—oh, no, Toby!—you know me better than to think that, surely!"

Toby turned his head from me and drew his hat still farther forward.

I was silent for a moment, wondering if I should say more. But I felt communicative that night, and as I always before had taken Toby into my confidence, I could see no reason why I should not go on.

"And besides, Toby, you forget who she is and who I am. Zounds!" (I laughed harshly), "she, as I have said, is the only perfect woman in the world,—and what am I? She (and here's where the world comes in), she is the only child of a man with an income of from five to ten thousand at least,—and to what am I heir, Toby? Why, my good friend, we have a few hundred scraped together, a pair of good swords and a horse apiece, and—yes, Toby, old friend, your love and devotion, which I'd not exchange for a kingdom."

He cleared his throat with great vigour and gruffness, and drew his shoulders up to greater squareness.

"No, no, Toby. She's proud, doubtless—and with good reason—and I am but a blunt soldier. Bah! what good would it do me if I did love her? She looks on me as a good, honest fellow, and trusts me to lead her from her troubles—and honoured am I with the service; but as for loving me—oh, no, no, my friend, 'tis absurd!"

Toby turned on me almost savagely. "And why

should she not, Sir?" His mustaches bristled with indignation, like the hairs of an angry cat.

I could have hugged the little man for his loyalty.

"Why, because I am not worthy, Toby. Remember, my dear old friend, I am not the great hero you would make me. You are blind to my faults, old comrade, and doubtless think my like is not. Others take me at my true worth."

He made an impatient movement.

"Don't you see, Toby? I have nothing! No position, no wealth, no learning worth mentioning, and—as bad as any other failing—no looks. Why, Toby, my man" (I stepped into a patch of moonlight), "do but look at those boots—shapeless and discoloured; this coat—last year's style; this hat, gaze on it—that feather has not been curled in a half-year!"

"Dress!" said Toby scornfully.

"Dress! Zounds! dress is all I can claim,—and I haven't even that. And then come looks to complete my list of imperfections. I'm very homely, Toby."

"Oh, Sir!" (Vast depreciation.)

"Do you know, Toby, even my mother—and I was only six years of age when she died, so it must have been before that—said I was an ugly little devil."

I think Toby swore under his breath.

"No, she didn't think over much of my beauty,

and she should have known. My father said I was an ill-tempered young fiend that would end my life upon the gibbet. He cast me off and disowned me, as your know."

Toby coughed gruffly.

"Faith, old friend, I never have been very popular. You are the only soul with whom I have not quarrelled, and your forbearance accounts for that. And, knowing all these prodigious failings, you could for a moment think the most perfect creature God ever made could love me! Out, Toby,—'tis absurd!" I laughed a little, but it did not sound right, and then I bored more holes.

Toby was silent for some time, then he chuckled softly to himself.

I looked up, surprised and annoyed. "You are amused, Toby?"

"No, Sir!—No, Sir!—Just thinking, Sir."

"Oh! And what might be your thoughts, Toby? Do you see now how very wrong you were in thinking so foolishly of me as to suppose that I ever could be in love?"

"Yes, Sir. To be sure, Sir."

"What!—oh, yes. . . . I am glad you see your—your mistake." For some unaccountable reason, my voice shook painfully. "And you see, Toby," I went on, after a moment's pause, "I have another sad failing. You know, Toby, I—I swear like the devil—eh, Toby?"

"Yes, Sir,—very bad, Sir." He turned his head from me.

We walked on in silence toward the house.

"And, Toby," I said presently, "I am too old to change my habits, am I not?"

"Oh, yes, Sir!" he answered quickly, but in a voice that made me look at him hastily.

"And, after all, there is no life like that of a soldier, is there, Toby?"

"No, Sir! No, Sir! Of course not, Sir!"

We stepped back into the path near the little bridge, and, glancing back to see that we were alone, walked slowly up the gentle slope. On the bridge I halted. . . . It seemed an age since last I had crossed it. How still and peaceful it was!—that little span of rustic work with its undisturbed surroundings. How lazily it stretched from one bank to the other! 'Twas difficult to realise that this was the same little bridge over which we had rushed to cut off the escape of an enemy. No, it looked different now; the moonlight sparkled brighter on the water; no frightened birds sought shelter; scarce a leaf rustled in the gentle breeze; now it was the bridge of that first morning. Less than two weeks since that first morning! It seemed scarce a day, and yet a lifetime. Since that day, until this, nothing of great importance seemed to have happened, and yet—how much. I had come to unravel a plot,—and here Toby had discovered the key. How long ago that

seemed! The mysteries of the plot all were clear to me now, but my position was not what I had expected; the difficulties opposing me grew greater with every movement. Never before had the thought of defeat alarmed me—now I shuddered as I thought of the possibility. Yes, this time it was different—this time there should be no defeat;—this time it hurt, it hurt.

I stared into the water and tried to see the fishes—her fishes—but they were not there.

"Zooks! how sharp was her tongue that morning!" I muttered, and smiled at the memory of her startled look as she stood upon the great, flat stone, ready to flee, and yet attempting to look dauntless. "A brave little heart! And the odds that were against her, and what defeat meant! And then her sharpness when I protested my innocence. She thought I was spying upon her. Then I protest: 'Madam,' I said, 'I swear——' 'Yes,' she snaps out, ere I could proceed, 'I heard you, Sir!'" I chuckled to myself. "And then her irrepressible youth, which sprang up within her and overflowed. How she seemed to trust me from the first! Zounds! how happy the world would be with more such unsuspecting spirits! And then we fed the fishes—her pets. . . . Then Toby came and surprised me. Ah, the sparkle in the little man's eyes when he caught me! Do you remember, Toby?"

"What, Sir?"

"Why, the bridge, the fishes—that morning!"

"Oh, yes, Sir! Very well, Sir!"

"Ah, that was a great day, Toby! Faith, there will be no more like it, my friend."

"And—and the arbour, Sir."

"Ay, and the arbour, Toby."

"And the butterfly, Sir."

I looked sharply at him. I feared he was laughing in his sleeve, but his face was more sad than gay.

"And the rosebush, Toby."

He laughed, then put his hand to the hollow of his back. "Zooks! I never shall forget the rosebush! My back aches now when I think of it, Sir."

"Ah, yes, yes, that was a great day, my friend! And there will be no more, no more! To-morrow will begin with what I fear will be a tragedy. And, Toby, we must come out on top. Remember, old comrade, there shall be no such word as fail. 'Tis not for ourselves, but for her. She must be saved, Toby! May we be damned for knaves through all eternity if we go down until our work is done!"

"Amen, Sir," said Toby solemnly, and grasped my outstretched hand in a gripe there was no mistaking.

CHAPTER XIII.

As we emerged from the path and started to cross the lawn I was struck with surprise to see the lights still shining brightly from the windows of the room in which Sir Alfred and the Earl had been talking, as well as from the main hall. I was filled with a sadness and disgust, also, for if Sir Alfred was still up, as the lights would lead one to suppose, it meant that he had taken no heed of the warning that I had given him in the supper-room.

"The pitiable creature has been frightened into giving his consent," I thought. "He is a child in that knave's hands. Ah, the shame of cowardice! To what will it not make its victims stoop? He clearly saw that what I said was true. 'Twas not mere indignation that almost strangled him; 'twas the recognising of an ugly truth. And he will sink his daughter to such a depth merely to save his miserable neck! Ah! 'tis too revolting!"

Faith, when he left the room I had no thought that he would have the strength to face the matter bravely. I thought the Earl would win. But now, as I fully realised that he had consented to bear the disgrace, it turned me sick at heart. I ground my teeth in rage and disgust, and silently swore that

it should not be, even if the whole of England should rise against me.

I felt a desperate feeling of recklessness begin to boil up within me. It always comes to me when I am pressed too hard. Its presence made me to realise the hopelessness of my undertaking, for I always have been my own master, and feel confidence of ultimate triumph until it comes. It is the smouldering embers of a fiery temper crushed into control by years of discipline. But at a great crisis it is dangerous—'twill burst out with a force that always sweeps me from my feet. 'Twill hurl me on against my opposition, and then—something always has given way. Before this night it had been the opposition; but this time—I wondered which. Only the first symptoms now were present. I still was master of myself, and I made a great struggle to remain so. I crushed the fire within my heart, determined to fight my opponents with all the coolness I could muster. Before the end I should give way to it, I felt; but not now, or I should do more harm than good.

On the second floor the windows all were dark. I paused and looked more particularly at hers. The little white face in the moonlight was not there. "She sleeps peacefully," I thought, "all unconscious of the victory of the great black spider on the floor below. Or does she toss restlessly and doubt my power to guide her safely through?" My jaw

tightened and I griped my fists as we drew nearer. "Damnation! she shall come safely out," I muttered. Then: "But I must stop that swearing; 'tis vastly rough and unbecoming." A moment later I smiled at my proposed reformation.

At the corner of the house we stopped.

"They are gay, Toby. They illuminate in honour of their victory in getting their man safely through."

"Yes, Sir; but they don't seem very boisterous over it, Sir."

I went to the window and listened. Not a sound came from within.

"Well, Toby, sleep with loaded pistols, and warn the men to be prepared. Call me at the first alarm, should anything happen this night."

"Yes, Sir. Good-night, Sir." He touched his hat and turned to go, but after three steps again came to a halt. "Beg pardon, Sir," he said, approaching, "but you will retire now, Sir?"

"Yes, yes, of course, Toby." Then I smiled. "Why, my friend, did you think I might take another stroll?"

He pulled at his upper lip and regarded me strangely for a moment, his head held to one side. Then he saluted again smartly and strutted toward the rear.

I stood looking after him until he disappeared, then walked slowly to the door. There was a little movement within as I turned the knob, but when I

swung the door from me and stood upon the threshold, as a precaution against a sudden atttack, everything was orderly and calm. Two large candlesticks stood upon the table, a little fire crackled merrily beneath the mantel, and wreaths of blue smoke curled lazily up from behind a small volume in the Earl of Cadwaller's hands. I entered and glanced behind the door, which I then closed.

His Lordship calmly looked up, his finger marking his page. "All safe, Sir," he sneered. "'Od's fish! you grow timid, my friend."

"I always know where to expect assassins, my Lord."

"From old associations, I suppose." He blew a smoke-ring into the air, then cut it with his long pipe-stem.

"They always choose one kind of company."

"Then you are lonely?" He raised his eyebrows.

"Nay, faith, most cheerful, which should prove me a knave."

"But something irritable since your little defeat." He laughed softly, and puffed his pipe with great relish.

"Nay, pleasured with your great haste to suicide."

"Suicide!" Again he laughed.

I placed a chair with its back against the wall by the fire and sat down.

"Yes, my Lord, you hasten your fate."

"And such a fate!" he smiled. "Oh, the Fates are with me!"

"They soon will be, my Lord."

"'Slife, Sir, they are already! Come, felicitate me; I have won."

"Yes?" I laughed.

"Yes, a fact, I assure you. Will you not smoke a pipe with me?" He smilingly held it toward me, then lighted a splint in the flame of a candle.

I took it, shook the tobacco from the bowl into the fire, crossed to the table and refilled it from the jar. He sat staring for a moment, then stroked his jaw slowly and smiled in amusement.

"As cautious as the Duke of York!" he laughed. "But then, I suppose all great folk are alike. Doubtless you fear a plot to rob you of the succession."

"No, I fear if I should smoke what you gave me I might wear a crown all too soon, my Lord."

"You flatter yourself, Sir; I have no need to resort to such measures."

"No?"

"No." He smiled very contentedly, crossed his legs and resumed his occupation of playing with the smoke-rings. I said nothing, but puffed thoughtfully and watched him. His eyes twinkled merrily, as though he was relishing some pleasant secret.

"You are determined to fight my battles for me,"

he said presently. "First you came across my path to capture, but failed."

"You are fleet of foot, my Lord."

He carelessly waved my remark aside. "You irritated me somewhat then, but at the same time gave me my strongest card—you put Sir Alfred within my power, when you gave the King his sword. A bad mistake, was it not? But then, I suppose you were free to act disinterestedly at that time; you had not fallen into the golden web, eh? 'Sblood! is it not strange that all—even the lowest—of our sex are so vulnerable in a certain spot? The most hardened ruffian is as susceptible as the most refined——"

"Ruffian?"

"No,—gentleman."

"Go on, pray; you are vastly instructing, my Lord."

"'Tis from you I learn, Sir. But permit me to proceed with the list of favours you have rendered me."

"After placing Sir Alfred within my power, you prevented his unwise flight, which increased my indebtedness to you. Then you upset the plans of Sir Charles and his powerful supporters, which made my third debt." (He was counting them by touching his fingers with his pipe-stem). "And, as though these were not enough kindnesses, you this night have rendered me a fourth. I have no more to ask, for this last has removed the obstacle that you created."

He looked at me closely and strangely, to see whether I had caught his meaning or not.

I sat smoking in silence, trying to find in what had happened that night an act of mine that would agree with his reference to this fourth kindness. Faith, twist my brain as I would, I could think of nothing that would explain it. So far as my knowledge went, nothing to contribute to his success had happened except the escape of his servant, which would assure him of assistance. But by no stretch of my imagination could I see where I had helped the servant to pass out. And then, what did he mean by: "This last has removed the obstacle that you created?" No, 'twas clear that he did not refer to the flight of the servant. But if not that, then what? I must have shown my lack of comprehension in my face, for he made an impatient move and said:

"'Slife! it must be later than I had thought; when Master Everard's bright mind cannot grasp a plain statement 'tis time for weaker wits to be abed."

I still sat watching him as he rose and, placing his pipe upon the table and his book in his pocket, stretched his arms far above his head and yawned lazily. There were sly devils lurking somewhere deep in his eyes, which he never took off me from the moment he made the remark about the fourth kindness I had done him. There he stood, the long, tapering fingers stroking his pointed jaw, which betrayed the trait of character, the perversion of which

was the cause of his present depravity. The rebellious feeling of recklessness that I had felt before entering again took hold of me. He meant something fiendish, I could see by his look. What, what could it be? 'Twas nothing that had happened in the grounds. In the house then. And if in the house, and it assured his success, as he said, then it must be injurious to Mistress Heron. I felt my lips tighten and my nostrils twitch, and as I peered intently through the smoke that now rose furiously before my face, the long-disciplined fire mounted quickly from heart to head and almost gained control.

His Lordship turned away slowly, moved to the other side of the table, and again stood still. "You may have solved the riddle ere sunrise," he smiled. 'A good-night to you, Sir. May you enjoy your watch." His eyes turned, for a fraction of a second, toward the door of the room in which he and Sir Alfred had been talking earlier in the evening.

Like a flash the strangeness of the lights burning within that room at that late hour came to me. Not a sound had come from there to tell that it was occupied. And the Earl reading alone in the hall, when the rest of the house was hushed in slumber! A sudden suspicion took hold of me, and I glanced quickly to his Lordship, then to the door again.

He saw my look, and smiled. "Ah, your wits are reviving, my friend," he nodded. Then I think he saw the fire in my eyes, and was warned. "Again,

good-night to you," he smiled, and turned toward the stairs.

I slowly rose, every muscle strained to keep control of myself. "Halt!" I growled in a voice that told me how near I was to the danger point. "Not so fast, my Lord Cadwaller." I kept my eyes on him and crossed to the foot of the stairs.

For a moment a look of dismay was on his face, then his careless sneer returned. "Oh, you still desire company? Really, you grow tiresome, my friend."

"Come," I said, speaking very low, "stop that, Sir; we are done with child's play. Banish that sneer, you knave, or I shall carve it from you!"

"Stand aside, or——"

I seized his arm in a gripe that sunk each finger deep, and drew him to me. "Now, Sir, I have quit the play. I am now Mark Everard, who never yet has known defeat. Stop squirming or I shall pull your villainous bones apart. Now, answer my question: Who is in that room?"

He tried to look dignified, but his eyes dropped before my stare.

I seized his other arm and shook him roughly. "Quick!"

He looked me in the face, a fear creeping into his eyes. "Not a soul," he said strangely.

"What!" I was a little taken aback, so relaxed my gripe.

At the sound of Cadwaller's voice, a sudden change came over the features of the stricken man. His eyes blazed like fire and almost started from his head; the veins of his face and neck stood out in great black ridges; and his breast rose as though it would burst. He was making a desperate effort to move, but no part but his eyes succeeded, and they seemed powerless to turn in their sockets, or do aught but twitch slightly and transmit the inward fire. Even the hands remained folded upon the breast, like those of a corpse. A handkerchief, which I recognised as the Earl's, lying on the floor beside the head, accounted for this strange position.

"Come here," I said briefly to Cadwaller, as I opened the poor sufferer's band, that he might not choke. Then, as the knave still hesitated: "Come," I repeated, "you have no cause for fear; he is not the ghost you thought him. You were a little too hasty, my Lord, in laying his body out."

When his Lordship saw that the drear sounds had come from a live man, and not an angry spirit, as he had thought, his self-assurance was not long in returning. He approached the sofa a little timidly, but when he had gazed for a moment upon the wild, blazing eyes of the man that he so had wronged, the colour came into his face again, and presently he turned to me with something of his accustomed insolence.

"This is your work, Sir," he said quietly. "'Tis

the result of your damned meddling in the supper-room."

"Liar, keep a check on your tongue!" I commanded, for I saw the effect his words had on Sir Alfred.

The stricken man's whole form was trembling with some terrible storm that made the beholding of it an agony. It would have been less shocking had his features moved, but as he was, his struggle was an awful spectacle. He seemed racked with pain and rage beyond human endurance, and was bound in bonds of no human forging. His breath rushed in through his teeth with a hissing sound, and escaped again in a sobbing groan. His eyes he was attempting to turn to Cadwaller, and the nearer they came to their goal the more fiercely they burned. Then, at last, they beheld the hated object;—a struggle, the most savage yet, set in. The mouth drew back at the right side and left exposed the teeth, on which a froth had gathered; the right hand twitched for a moment, then opened wide and moved from the other, which still seemed dead; the right leg stirred next in painful jerks, bent at the knee with great labour, and pressed against the sofa-back, as though to shove its owner to the floor. His appearance was shocking beyond my power of describing.

The Earl drew back and turned his face away to escape the stare of hate from those awful eyes. I sprang to the poor sufferer's side and raised his

shoulders upon my arm. But he seemed to take no notice of my act; his eyes remained fixed on Cadwaller, and he continued his desperate struggle to reach the floor. By sheer force of will and burning rage Sir Alfred was tearing his body free from the gripe of death that grasped his every muscle. Inch by inch his right side was moving, as though fighting a weight of lead. His left side still was helpless, the arm hanging limp and lifeless from the shoulder, and that side of the face fixed and dead as marble, while the right twitched and grinned horribly.

"Be calm, be calm, Sir!" I pleaded, for I knew his rage must but hasten the end.

His reply was another tremendous strain that wrenched his every bone, a spasmodic griping of the hand, and a yet more hideous grin, as, with my support, he wriggled himself into an almost upright position. Death was yielding to a wronged man's rage.

"Stop!" cried the Earl, shrill and trembling. "Leave him alone! The fool is—is coming to life again!" The King's dog was giving way again. He kept his hand upon his hilt, which he clutched till his knuckles were white.

"Silence, cur, or you shall be the first to pass!"

Sir Alfred's right side worked more vigorously. Now his lips were twitching with more suppleness, and some babbling sounds came forth. He was making heroic efforts to launch a curse, I know.

Cadwaller saw and heard the attempt, for he

sneaked to the other side of the table, where he stood staring fixedly at Sir Alfred, a strange mixture of fear and expectation on his face.

Again Sir Alfred babbled,—and his Lordship laughed uneasily, as a woman laughs when overwrought with fear.

The effect on the stricken man was wonderful. His whole right side shook off the last shreds of Death's strong bands; he clenched his fist and sprang from the sofa, then toppled to the left, and should have fallen but for my support; his mouth and eyes worked madly for a moment, unintelligible words rolling out in a torrent. His voice was hoarse with pent-up passion, and his words were made thick by a useless tongue.

"Dog!" he forced out at last. "Dog! dog! dog!" For a space this was the only word he could pronounce, and he repeated it a many times in satisfaction.

Again my Lord laughed unnaturally,—and chills ran through my frame.

Sir Alfred's mouth worked hideously. I could feel my own muscle strain, as though forced to help him to break the power of the stroke. My lips twitched and ached in sympathy with his, and my eyes were wide with awe.

"Dog! Traitor!" He seemed to cough the words out. Then came something that I could not catch. . . . "Castlemaine! Castlemaine!" He hurled it

indistinctly forth. "You—would—make—my daughter—into a—Castlemaine!" He gasped and choked on every word.

His Lordship grinned a sickly grin and moistened his lips with his tongue.

"Kill—the knave; Everard! Kill him—kill him!" He struggled desperately to cross to where Cadwaller stood, but the stroke again had griped tightly his right leg; 'twas upon my arm his whole weight hung. He realised his helplessness. "I'm done!—I'm done!" he muttered. . . . He gasped for a moment, his eyes glaring wildly around the room, as though he sought for someone. "Where is she?" he choked out suddenly. "Not gone! He has not—got her?"

"Nay, nay, Sir! she is safe! Calm yourself, Sir Alfred!" I tried to get him back to the sofa, but he struggled against it.

"No, no!" he gasped. "Quick;—I'm going! Save her,—Everard!—save her!" His weight grew heavier upon my arm, his eyes closed for a little space, and his breath came with greater difficulty. A convulsion ran through his body, and a sickening rattle sounded in his throat.

My Lord attempted to sigh his relief, but it sounded like the croak of a raven.

Sir Alfred sprang into new life, as though the sound of Cadwaller's voice were a match that set off a mine of rage within him; and the Earl stepped

back with a high-pitched cry of fear, and hand on hilt.

"He—he mocks me!" coughed Sir Alfred. "Curse you—dog! A—Castlemaine, eh! Ha! ha!" His laugh was horrible, and the expression of the one live side of his face no less so. His right arm he stretched out as though to gripe the hated throat; and with my support he actually hobbled a pace forward.

"Keep back!" cried my Lord hoarsely, his face grinning and twitching uncontrollably. "I'll kill you, by God! Don't look at me like that!" And again he laughed that awful laugh of fear.

"Ha! ha!" Sir Alfred croaked, "he fears me! Ha, dog! you would—make her—into a—Castlemaine! You—you told—me so! And you—struck me—with your fist,—dog! I am—coming now—to tear—your lying—tongue out—with these —dying — fingers! Ha! ha!" The inhuman chuckle made me shudder and turn cold.

"Back! back!" cried Cadwaller, cringing, yet fascinated by the other's eyes.

"Ha! ha!" croaked Sir Alfred, "you would—ruin me—if—I did not—give my consent—eh? You may—do your worst—now, but I—shall kill—you." Again he coughed the cough of death and hobbled forward, the right hand working in spasmodic gripings, eager to tear his Lordship's throat.

The Earl was a hideous sight. He cringed beside

the table, on which one hand was griped tightly—the other held his sword, the point rattling on the floor; his face was white and drawn; his eyes starting from their sockets and staring in fearful fascination at the threatening form coming toward him; and his mouth twisted and twitched in fear, as he moistened his lips with his tongue.

Suddenly, with a curse, he sprang forward and flashed his blade across the table. I swung Sir Alfred aside. The blow missed him, and Cadwaller almost lost his balance as he leaned toward us.

"Coward!" Sir Alfred croaked, and hurled himself from my arm and fell upon the table, the grasping, claw-like hand shutting relentlessly on the hated throat.

"Help!" Cadwaller choked, and drew back his sword. I struck it from his hand. He tore and twisted at the hand that held him; his face grew purple, then black; he tried to scream, but could not; and still the hand did not relax. He struck madly at the dead form before him, his mouth opening and closing quickly,—but no move came from Sir Alfred, and no sound passed his Lordship's lips. His eyes rolled wildly at me, but I made no move to save him. He swayed, gave one last pull at the deadly hand, sinking his fingers into it, tottered more unsteadily—and fell heavily to the floor. Sir Alfred's body slid partly across the table,—then came a ripping of linen, and the dead man slipped back again,

and to the floor beside me, his Lordship's band and ruffles in his gripe of death.

One half of the dead face almost smiled, but the eyes blazed quite as fiercely as a moment before. . . . He had died at the moment he seized Cadwaller's throat.

My face was wet with horror, and I shuddered as I turned away.

At that moment a scream, shrill, piercing and full of terror, rang trembling through the house. Then another and another. 'Twas a woman's voice. Yes!—yes! it was hers!

"My God! such a night!" I groaned, as, with cold and shaking fingers, I sought the door-key,

CHAPTER XIV.

The door slammed behind me, and I sprang up the stairs three steps at a time. Her voice rang in my ears and turned me chill at heart.

"Help! help!" she screamed. "Master Everard!—quick!—here!"

"Ay, Madam, I come! I come!" I shouted, and dashed along the passage toward her calls.

Another female voice was screaming wildly. Then a door slammed, wild laughter pierced the darkness, and heavy, deadened blows, as of some one hurling his weight against a door, came from a near-by room.

I cursed the darkness that caused me to go slower as I drew near. I could not see my hand before me, but felt my way along the wall.

"Help!" screamed the second voice, which I knew to be that of the maid, Martha.

"Be quiet!" Mistress Heron commanded. "We are here, Master Everard!" She rapped upon the door to guide me.

"Yes, Madam!" I sprang to the door, knocking my fingers severely against the frame as I slid them quickly along the wall. The heavy blows still sounded, and I heard a crackling of wood, as though

a door within was giving way. The cause of these sounds was working with great fury, for blow on blow fell without a moment's space between. Not a word did he speak, but worked grimly on, hurling himself against the door with a force that shook the walls.

"Quick!" I cried. "Open and come out!"

"The door is locked," she answered, her voice shaking with excitement.

"Yes, but unlock it quickly and come forth! Delay may cost your life! Quick! quick!" I shook the door-knob angrily.

The maid screamed wildly. "Oh! he's coming! he's coming!" she cried. "See, Madam, see, the door is cracking! We both shall be murdered! We both shall be murdered!" Again she laughed and wept with terror.

"Silence!" cried her mistress. I heard her stamp her bare foot upon the floor. This was followed immediately by a sharp slap, and the maid lapsed into a whimpering wail that reminded me of the little foreign Queen the night she drove with me to Whitehall.

"Haste! haste!" I cried again, as I heard the heavy blows continue. "Open, Madam, open! That door, I hear, is giving way!"

"I cannot open, Sir! But you must make haste if you would save us; the door is splitting, and I fear he means to take my life." Her voice was almost

calm, but evidently under great force of will, for it sounded sharp and shrill.

"My God, Madam! I know he means to take your life! Banish this modesty, and let me save you! It—it is dark here, Madam."

I'll swear she laughed,—very low, and for but a moment, but laugh she did. "No, no, it is not that," she said presently. "The key is not here."

"Not there!" The thought sent a chill to my heart.

"No," and her voice shook, "I locked the door and took the key to my room, and when I ran in here I forgot to bring it!"

The door creaked louder and louder, the unrelenting fiend hurling his weight in unabated fury.

"Where is your room? Can I get the key?" I felt a cold moisture break out on my forehead again.

"No, no, no! He is in my room. This is my maid's. 'Tis the door between that he is breaking down!" She was incredibly calm for one in her terrible position. She saw and fully realised her danger, but instead of this knowledge driving her frantic with fear, as it would any other woman, it made her cool and steady, prepared to face a desperate situation with a courage that few men can boast.

I groaned aloud as the horror of her position was forced upon me. "Who can the fiend be?" flashed

through my mind. That his object was murder I could not doubt, for had it been anything less, he would not have been so bold nor determined as to attempt to break down a door to follow her, after the alarm had been given and he knew that assistance was at hand. There she was, shut within four narrow walls, with no chance of escape, and a murderous ruffian storming at the door, which, most assuredly, must give way; and there stood I, unable to set her free or get at her would-be assassin. If I had but had a pistol all should have been well—I could have blown the lock into pieces; but I had only my sword, here useless. She trusted in me to take her safely through, and here I was failing miserably, being defeated by some unknown scoundrel that I had not expected, and whose reason for his act I could not comprehend. Failing! failing! failing! Hearing her murdered, when only a door separated me from her! The thought drove me almost mad, and I, that never before had known fear, now trembled and turned faint. All this flashed through my mind as swiftly as lightning darts. I thought quickly, oh, how quickly! for my heart was in each thought.

"Which is the door of your room?" I shouted, as I heard the creaking oak crack louder—a warning that the end was near.

"The first door to the right; but it is locked! He entered through the window!"

"The window!" Ah, if I had time I might yet save her!

"Yes, the window!" she called above the ever-increasing noise.

"Quick!" I cried. "Move anything heavy against the door,—a bed or anything,—and hold out for your life! I shall save you if you can hold out!"

"Yes, yes!" she answered. "I trust in you!" The voice and words came as a spur more potent than all others, as I sprang recklessly along the dark passage to the stairs.

The thought that it was because of the warning I had given her that she had taken the care to lock her maid's door and take the key flashed reproachfully through my mind, as I dashed down the steps at break-neck speed, and I cursed myself for my caution. On the landing I paused long enough to place my fingers between my lips and whistle shrilly, my old signal to Toby. In the hall below-stairs I almost collided with two half-dressed and sorely frightened servants, who at sight of me fled in terror, screaming that I had murdered their mistress, and calling for help.

"Oh, if I can be in time!" I groaned between clenched teeth, as I swung the main door open and sprang forth. Never before had I seemed so slow of foot. I was a laggard, and, though I strained every muscle to force a greater speed, the ground

seemed barely to crawl beneath my feet. I felt as in some terrible dream, straining to reach a goal in time, but cramped and retarded by some strange, malicious force. My head throbbed, my breath came with a great effort and painfully. I could have sobbed like a child with rage as I pictured the creaking door give way, and saw her writhing in the hands of her assassin. My God! would I never reach that window? It seemed a year, a decade, a lifetime, since I had left the upper hall, with her sweet voice ringing in my ears! "I trust in you!" she had called. And would I fail her? No! Or if I should, I would not see another sun! I shouted aloud with joy as I beheld the large bow window directly beneath the lattice at which I had seen the sad little face in the moonlight.

"At last!" I shouted, and dashed toward a ladder that leaned against the lower window. My hands shook with excitement as I seized the steps and mounted. The lattice above me was partly open, and the cries of the frantic maid came forth distinctly. The blows were thundering yet, but with each blow came another, louder and sharper. From this I knew that my warning had been followed—something had been placed against the door, which so far had saved it. As I stepped from the ladder and reached for the little window, a hand that held a knife was thrust out quickly, and a savage blow aimed at me.

"Ha, dog!" I cried, and seized the wrist. But he twisted it from my grasp with a strength surprising, and slammed the window shut.

Blows still sounded from within, but not on the creaking door. They were short, sharp and frequent, and were doubtless made by a sword-hilt. Then I heard Toby's voice.

"Quick! quick! open, I say!" came the gruff old soldier's tones. "Come, come!—am I to be kept much longer?" One would think him the King of England in a fit of impatience from the authority in his voice. Again came the sharp knocking. "Haste! haste! or I must needs use force! If you would save your skin, obey!"

I still stood listening, awaiting the outcome of Toby's action. We had the knave—whoever he was—between us, and so long as he was unable to leave the window, he could do no further damage to the door of the maid's room. Martha whimpered a little, but paused as though to listen whenever Toby spoke. No word came from Mistress Heron, except a call to Toby that she was safe. Ah, there was a heart! Of such quality are heroes made! No weeping there, nor quavering voice! Zounds! her like the world never again shall see!

"Come, I do not wish to injure the door! And if you defy me longer I shall take your life!" The little man's voice was more angry. I could tell by its sharpness that his patience was at an end, and

that the fear of damaging the door would restrain him no longer.

"Fire the lock, Toby!" I shouted. "'Twill save my breaking this window!"

Faith, the place where I stood was not the most desirable position one could wish for either attack or defence. The rounding top of a bow window—even though it be a large one—is a mighty poor place for a fight, especially when your antagonist is to spring from a casement, the bottom of which is on a level with your breast. After giving my order to Toby, the lack of soundness of my footing warned me to put myself in readiness for what would happen when the little man would burst into the room. The murderous ruffian within would not show fight, I thought—that is, to Toby. No, it was more to be expected that he would prefer to face me, for he knew that I was without firearms, and standing upon a most uncertain platform. Had the thought of retreating to the ground occurred to me all would have been well. But retreat is a thing that never has come quickly to me, as it does to some others, for one is so liable to trip in going backward that I had grown accustomed to do very well without this mode of movement.

"Now, Sir, if you rush out when the door opens I have another pistol for you!" Toby shouted in warning. Then he called to Mistress Heron: "Be not alarmed, Madam, at the fire; I am only unlocking

the door! Keep back, now!" he growled angrily—and I knew he must be speaking to one of the servants. "If you stand there you may be hurt! Yes, that is better! Ready, Sir?"

"Yes, Toby! Come on!" I crouched as low and close to the house as possible, keeping well to one side of the casement to avoid a stab from the murderous-looking knife that I had escaped a few moments before.

Crash! came the sound of the pistol. The maid screamed loudly, the window above me shook a little. I heard a moving within, as though the knave was preparing to come forth. Then came another crash, not of a pistol this time, but of a weight hurled against a door with a shattered lock. I bent my arm to protect my head and to grapple with the fugitive. Another crash against the door—the window above my head flew open—a blade flashed in the last rays of the setting moon—I caught a wrist as hard as steel—and the next moment was struggling savagely with a black, lithe form that twisted like a snake, and fought to free the hand that held the knife. Not a word did my antagonist utter, but once I caught a gleam of white teeth beneath a black masque, as his face came for an instant into a ray of moonlight.

"Twist him round, Sir!" Toby growled, thrusting his head without. "A little more, Sir, and I can reach him!"

But my antagonist also heard these directions, and

seemed not inclined to make himself a willing victim to the butt of Toby's pistol, which gleamed above our heads. He bent low, wrapped his free arm around my waist, contrived to get his foot against the side of the house, and hurled himself recklessly forward. There seemed to be but little difference in our strength—I had a small advantage in this respect, I think; but he was more agile, and with his foot against the wall had no great difficulty in forcing me back. I felt my foot slip—saw Toby lean still farther forward and grasp wildly at the hand with the knife—saw the window next to where we fought fly open and a white figure lean far out, wring her hands, and shout to Toby: "Make haste! Make haste! Quick! he will be killed! Merciful Heaven, save him!"

"Hold on, Sir!" Toby growled, and drew his sword.

My foot struck the little railing that stood about a foot high around the edge of our slippery platform. Toby's blade flashed as he drew it back to lunge. My antagonist again pressed forward; my balance was lost, and we both pitched over the railing into the darkness below, struggling furiously as we fell. In the air I managed to turn him that he would not fall fairly upon me. Then an oath rolled out from Toby, a groan from Mistress Heron,—and the earth sprang up out of the darkness and crashed against us with a blaze of stars. . . .

A moment of darkness—the form with which I was locked rolled from me—I felt a hand feeling over my heart—footsteps, that sounded as from a vast distance, came hastily down the ladder—fingers pressed between my ribs, as though well to mark the exact spot of the beating—a blade, which seemed huge and crooked, flashed between the starry sky and me. . . . My scattered senses then came back, and I shifted quickly to one side. I felt in my side the sharp bite of steel—then came a rush of feet—a moment later a pistol shot rang out—more running, which ended in a storm of oaths at the edge of the trees near-by.

I sat up, leaning upon my left arm, but it pained malignantly and forced me to stagger to my feet. I could feel the warm blood trickling down my side to my waist-belt. It felt soothing, so I leaned against the great bow window and gazed up at the stars, wondering at the strange sounds that floated down from the windows above me. Some one was weeping wildly, a door banged, and more distant voices rose in excited shoutings. A light now streamed from the window of the maid's room, and then—yes, I could swear to that voice—"Button that, and stop weeping at once!" The sobbing became more subdued—it sounded far off and soothing.

"Oh, you will be murdered, Mistress! Please, Madam, don't go!"

"Silence, ingrate! He has given his life for me!

Haste!" The voice was strained and trembling, and seemed to catch in the beautiful throat that spoke the words.

"But you will be murdered! Oh! Mistress! Mistress!"

"Now who will be murdered?" I muttered, my hand pressed to my head. "Not Mistress Heron, by Heaven! No, not while Mark Everard wears a sword!" I staggered along the wall in the direction of the main entrance. The house seemed quarrelsome, and struck me most cruelly every few paces I took. The stars were gay, for they whirled merrily around the sky and dipped gracefully to the earth, which rose to meet them, harmoniously keeping time with the strange beating within my head. I walked over hills and through hollows, missing firm ground where I expected it, and suddenly encountering it when I thought to step into the trough. It rocked and rolled surprisingly. 'Twas a sea of earth, tossing most boisterously. At every encounter with the house something would bite me in the side, and then my left arm would ache most ridiculously. Even my sword—my oldest companion and best friend—was absurdly provoking. It persisted in conducting itself like a thing of inexperience. It seemed to be in league with the wall. With every other step I took it would insert itself between my legs and hurl me forward or against the stones—against those vicious stones that held the knives.

Once I fell upon a rolling wave of earth and had a most ludicrous time in regaining my feet, for the ground heaved and rocked so absurdly that it turned me light at head. Faith, I should have despaired of reaching the door that night, and should have been content to sleep upon that soft wave that rocked me so soothingly had it not been for the words that kept ringing in my ears.

"You will be murdered, Mistress! You will be murdered, Mistress!" How clearly they rang, even though they did come from an almost incredible distance! They spurred me on when I had become discouraged, and was sore tempted to rest in comfort until the storm had passed.

"Mistress Heron murdered! Ha! ha! No, not while Mark Everard wears a sword!" I cried. But my voice was lost in the roaring of the waves—those strange green waves that dashed against the house and broke into a spray of stars. "Zounds! she shall not be murdered if the whole earth upset! 'I trust in you,' she said. Ha! and shall I fail her? Not while I wear a sword, even if it is unaccountably mischievous and provoking."

I plunged ahead over the rolling sea. Ah! there were the steps. They sprang forward to meet me.

"A little impulse and rough, my friends!" I admonished, as I picked myself up from where the top one had thrown me.

The door-knob avoided my hand, and dodged play-

fully from side to side, and it took me a moment or two ere I became used to its motions. But finally I seized it and smiled at its fruitless efforts to break loose again.

"She shall not be murdered while Mark Everard wears a sword!" I shouted, and swung the door open and lurched into the room.

Zounds! even the house within was monstrous playful and unsteady. The floor rolled as unevenly as the lawn without. The door slammed shut behind me, and I turned to see who had dared to wrench it so roughly from my grasp. No one was in sight, and I saw from the waves running along the walls that the door itself was responsible. Many more candles had been placed upon the table since I left the room a few moments before. Zooks! the table was one mass of lights—playful, graceful lights that danced right merrily, twisting in and out in soothing evolutions. But I had no leisure to watch the pretty scene, for some one was in danger of being murdered—some one with a voice like music and a heart of kindness—some one that trusted in me to save her. There could be no dallying to gaze upon a table full of mad candles, even though their glitter was alluring. I moved on with uncertain steps toward the bronze Sultana standing upon the post at the foot of the stairs. Ah! now I saw the cause of all the wild disturbance. She danced slowly and gracefully upon her little stage, bending her body

from side to side in most surprising curves, and waving her hand, full of many-coloured lights, in circles overhead. That spray of candles was her wand, I saw. She must be stopped—then all would be well. I stepped over the uncertain floor toward her. I raised my hand and seized her by the ankle. My arm pained me cruelly as I raised it, but I was determined to stop this dizzy whirl. Zooks! she uttered a low cry as I caught her—a sympathetic little cry that was half a sob. I looked up at her in surprise. Her head was held high, and she still waved her wand of lights. Again I heard the cry: "You are killed! You are killed!" it sobbed very low.

"Who is killed?" I asked, and drew my sword. "Not Mistress Heron!" My throat ached and my breath came with an effort. I stared wonderingly at the bronze figure, but it paid no heed to me.

"Oh, noble, noble soul! You have given your life for mine!"

I looked around the room, deeply puzzled. Then I felt something upon my shoulder. I turned my eyes to it, and beheld a hand—a delicate white hand to which an arm was attached, and at the end of the arm a figure in a long, loose robe. I followed the form to the feet, and saw that it was standing upon the first step of the stairs. My eyes wandered back to the face. Long, waving, dark brown hair fell

over the shoulders and cheeks. I leaned forward and peered into the strangely moving face.

"A noble gentleman!"

Zounds! how could I ever mistake that voice?—there was none other like it in the world!

"Pardon, Madam," I said thickly, leaning my sword against my leg and reaching for my hat. But my hand only caught my hair; by some strange chance my hat was gone. "Really, Madam, I did not see you. I thought it was the Sultana that spoke. A thousand apologies for my seeming rudeness! But, you see, the house rocks so absurdly that it has made my head to swim. Ha! ha! 'tis a strange storm, to be sure."

"Oh, God!" she groaned. "And all for me!" She vanished from where she stood, and presently I felt something thrust against the backs of my knees, and as they treacherously gave way an arm was gently pressed across my shoulders, and I sank softly, oh, how softly! into a great arm-chair.

"Oh, Madam!" I muttered, "this is absurd, quite absurd!" I struggled to rise, but she gently pressed me back.

"Please do not move! Oh, do not move! There, there!—to please me!"

"But you stand while I sit! 'Tis absurd, quite absurd! And you are in trouble. I heard you weeping but now. May not I serve you?"

I heard her stifle a sob and felt her fingers at my throat, loosening my band. And all the while she continued to speak in a soothing, broken voice, sweeter than anything I ever heard before. 'Twas such a novel experience that I had not the courage to protest, but lay still and watched that lovely face, full of tenderness, as she leaned before me like some glorious vision. I felt very faint now and tired, so I closed my eyes and smiled contentedly as I heard her give an order for some one to fetch wine at once. She spoke to me as to a petted child, and I lay wondering that such gentleness could live in a world of blows. Then I felt her hand shudder as it rested upon my shoulder, and she drew her breath sharply, as though she were hurt.

I sprang upright in my seat. "Where? Who is it?" I cried, and raised my point.

She only wept softly and gently pressed me back again. "Please, please, for me, be still!" she pleaded in my ear.

"But—but you are hurt, or alarmed! I felt you tremble!"

"No, no! No, no!" She turned her face away.

I put my hand stealthily to my side. It came away wet and sticky. I drew my coat more to the front, that she might not see.

"Here, take this," she said tenderly, and held a wineglass to my lips.

I drank greedily, for my throat was parched.

A door opened very softly. I turned my eyes toward the sound, as did the lady. The Earl of Cadwaller glided from the chamber of death, rolling unnaturally and keeping time with the bronze Sultana. In his hand he held something white, which I soon made out to be his ruffles. He started and drew back in alarm when he saw us, as did Mistress Heron at sight of him. The servant took the glass from the hand of his Mistress and retired to a little distance, keeping his gaze fixed on me. Cadwaller's eyes were wild, and hair disheveled—far from being the calm, self-possessed and sneering nobleman of an hour before. As he stared at me, however, his face changed from its look of fear to one of malignant hate. I saw his eyes and mouth change slowly as he took in the situation. The eyes became smaller and more fiery, until they looked like glowing coals, the mouth grew firmer and slowly drew back at the corners, until loose-lipped terror was transformed into snarling exultation.

"You may withdraw," he said hoarsely to the servant.

"Stay!" the lady commanded, as the man turned to go.

"And you also, Madam," the Earl continued. "'Tis late for you to be up, and this fellow and I have business to transact."

"Since when, my Lord, have I taken orders from you? Master Everard is sore wounded and cannot

talk with you. James, call some one to aid you in assisting Master Everard to his room."

"Oh, ho!" said his Lordship, peering at her closely. "So, ho!" He stroked his jaw for a moment, his look becoming more hateful as he leaned forward and rocked in time with the candles. "Our business will require no words, and the interview will not be to your liking, I make no doubt. Come, stand aside!" He reached a waving arm toward her, but she shuddered and drew back nearer to me.

The wine tingled through my veins and drove out the chills that were creeping in. I smiled at his Lordship, and rose with a bow. "You see, Sir," I said, resting upon the back of the chair, Mistress Heron is of no mind to accept your Lordship's orders; and, as you seem determined to enforce your will, I find it necessary to act as arbitrator. I decide against you, Sir, and warn you to desist" (I paused for breath) "in your persecution of this lady—or I shall be compelled—to drive you hence."

He rolled about most ludicrously and laughed hoarsely. Then he drew his sword and stepped forward, his blade curving most provokingly as he brought it up to guard.

"For shame!" cries the lady. "Coward! would you kill a dying man?" And, despite my efforts to prevent her, she stepped before me, her arm below mine in support.

"Nay, Madam," I muttered thickly, "permit me,

I shall rid the world of a villain, if you will—pardon the—execution—in your presence."

Cadwaller laughed again. "Ha! you are brave, Master Everard; you take refuge behind petticoats! 'Slife! a brave soldier!"

"You see now, Madam, how—urgent is the matter. His Lordship would rest. Pray pardon me." I attempted to free myself, but she clung to me and drew back the left side of my coat ere I could prevent.

"See, coward, with whom you would fight! Shame, my Lord! Behold that gash, Master Coward, and blush for the words you have spoken to the noblest heart in England!"

"Ah, Madam, 'tis nothing! Permit me—I pray!" The room danced more wildly as I looked down at her little white hand holding the coat back from the bloody gash in the clothing, from which great clots of blood were bulging.

She was stronger than I, and held me fast.

"This is the man that you would fight—the man that has been foully murdered in saving me from the hands of an assassin while you slept, my Lord! See, he can scarce hold his sword!"

"Oh, I protest! I protest! 'Tis absurd—quite absurd! Engarde, my Lord!"

"'Tis not my wish that he should hold his sword, Madam," Cadwaller sneered.

"Coward!" she cried.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Doubtless, but I shall assist him to pass. Stand aside!"

My blade had become monstrous heavy, and wriggled like a snake as I again raised it, and, gently putting the lady from me, lurched to one side and got my back against the rocking post. Cadwaller made a savage lunge before I was in position, but by instinct more than by reason I put it aside with my fantastic blade. The lady screamed, called for help and attempted to step between us; but my Lord changed position and roughly thrust her back, then sharply engaged with me. My old steel, though it was playing me strange tricks, forgot not its duty, for it sprang to meet his every trust.

"Ha! ha! my Lord!" I laughed, "your arm—has become—less sore. You fight—well—very well—for one—so sorely—hurt." My breath came in gasps, and with great difficulty. The room whirled swiftly, and I had much ado to keep my hold on the post with my left hand. It swung and twisted and struck me so cruelly that I could have cried out with rage. We fought for an hour, a day, for ages, and still the swords clicked with a force that almost hurled me from my feet. I saw Mistress Heron in the far, far distance. She was retreating backward, very stealthily, and she waved gracefully, like a delicate flower, as she faded in the red mist that came floating through the room. Her face was very anxious and her eyes wide, very wide, and full of pity.

Her hand was griped into her wavy hair, where it clutched painfully. She seemed to move with the undulations of the floor, and faded gradually behind my Lord Cadwaller. His Lordship fought on, a little wildly now, and he swore most foully when a twist in my sword gave his wrist a wrench.

"Ha! ha! my Lord—is injured!" I laughed. "You are daring—to play with such—tools, Sir!"

An arm flashed in front of the Earl's neck, then wrapped around it. His point sank to the floor, and he cursed unreasonably as he shook himself free and threw the lady from him.

"Now I shall—kill you,—dog!" I gasped. "You are deserving—of no—consideration! Haste, Master Spaniel!" I made a swift lunge, but the post sprang back and jerked me with it. I swore and gave another lunge, but my side seemed to split, and it threw me far to the left. The candles upon the table rushed toward me. I heard Cadwaller laugh, and saw his blade flash at me, but I wearily put it aside as the steps of the stairs came up against me.

"I am sorry—Madam,—but the—Sultana has—cast a spell upon me."

Again the steel flashed toward my chest, but I caught it with a great shock upon my hilt.

"Toby—will save—you," I gasped, and rolled to the restful floor.

There was a great noise of rushing feet, an oath, a loud trembling call from her for help, and a confused

gabbling of servants. I felt my sword snatched from my hand, and something brushed against my cheek.

"Oh, cowards!—cowards all! Seize him!—Seize him!"

I turned my head and glanced along the floor until I beheld Cadwaller. My eyes followed his form from the feet up, and finally rested upon the handsome, sneering face that now was blazing with a fire of fury. A servant rushed toward him as I looked, but my Lord dealt him a back-hand blow upon the arm with the flat of his sword, and the fellow sneaked off, whining and rubbing the bruise.

"Help! help!" again called Mistress Heron. The voice came from very near me, and again something brushed against my cheek. I stared at the soft thing that so strangely had caressed me, and discovered that it was a cloth. I followed it up, and came to the conclusion that it was a woman's gown—yes, it was hers, for there was that wavy hair at the top. Most surprising, to be sure!

"Come, Mistress, this folly must cease! You were not made to play the Amazon. Away from there until I despatch your cringing paramour."

"Oh!" she cried sharply, and started back a little.

"Ha! ha! I struck the mark, it would seem!"

"Coward!"

I sprang up quickly, when I grasped the situation,

but my side stabbed and stabbed, and took my breath away. I was unable to get above a half-sitting position, leaning with my elbow upon the first step, to which I clung to keep from falling.

"Come away, Mistress Amazon!" Cadwaller shouted angrily. "You but waste time; his doom is sealed!"

"You first must murder me, my Lord Cadwaller!"

Zounds! I knew that blade—that long and heavy blade, that took two slender, snow-white hands to hold it out toward that sneering, hateful face. 'Slife! she was fighting for me. Fighting for me!—a woman fighting for Mark Everard! Monstrous! I struggled almost to my feet, swayed from side to side—and finally collapsed at her feet, cursing my failing strength.

Cadwaller laughed while I struggled. "I now shall despatch your grovelling paramour!" he hissed, then repeated: "your paramour!" He quickly stepped forward and aimed his point at me. She struck at it sharply and knocked the blade far wide.

"Ha! dog! you fight—a woman! Brave work,—scoundrel!" I choked out, and crawled toward him.

But she stepped before me and aimed a sweeping blow at the coward's head. He struck it aside as though it had been a reed, and sent it whirling to the floor. The lady screamed and clasped her hands

before her. The knave sprang toward me and drew back his blade to strike.

"I am first!" she cried, with a catch in her voice, and threw herself upon her knees between us.

"Ha, shameless! come away from there! You are not for the slaughter, my fine lady!" He seized her arm with his free hand and roughly pulled her struggling to him.

"Oh, God!" she screamed, striking wildly. "Cowards, save him! save him! He will murder him before my eyes! Save him, or I will kill you all! Quick!—quick—help me! Oh, God! God where is Toby? Toby! Toby! Toby! your master is being murdered! Oh, Toby! Quick!—quick! Devil! Fiend! Devil! Oh, God, save him! Is there no other man in the world?" She screamed, scratched, and even bit at her persecutor, while I cursed, raved, struggled to my feet—and fell again. "Devil! Murderer! Oh, God, has all the world forsaken him? Toby! Toby! Toby! Oh, God! God! God! Where, where is Toby?"

"Here, Madam!" The door flew open, then crashed shut. "The devil!" rolled out in a voice of thunder, and I heard a blade shriek from the speed with which it left its scabbard.

"Don't kill—him, Toby;—he's mine!" I gasped, again raising myself upon my elbow.

The little man rushed upon the Earl and his heroic little antagonist. She now was struggling to break

loose, but the coward held her fast and thrust her between himself and Toby's flashing steel. She scratched like a tigress, missing no chance of inflicting pain or humiliation. Her breath came in gasps, her face was white and drawn, her hair flying wildly, her lips firm with the determination of a noble soul, her eyes flashing fire, but with every opportunity turning a pitying glance to me, as though measuring the distance that still kept me beyond the swing of the fatal sword. Zounds! what a woman!

Toby's blade stopped in a downward stroke, in which the flat side was turned to his Lordship's head, for the contemptible coward stooped behind the lady. The little man smothered an oath and shifted his grasp on a pistol from handle to muzzle. Clouded as was my brain, I at once divined his purpose. He lowered his point and stepped within the striking distance of Caldwaller's sword. The other saw the opportunity and flashed forward, hurling himself with a force sufficient to drive his sword up to the hilt through Toby's breast—if Toby had remained idle. What really did happen was quite different. Toby's long blade struck his Lordship's to the floor—held it there—slid along with a whistle until the two hilts crashed together; the pistol in the left hand disappeared, handle first, over Mistress Heron's shoulder —thuck! came a blow—and the Earl of Cadwaller sank to the floor in a shapeless heap.

"Thank God!" I heard the lady gasp.

Then my head went to the floor again. . . .

There was a great confusion of voices; someone rolled me over until I rested upon my back; wine was poured down my throat until I was almost strangled; water ran cold over my wounded side, smarting shrewdly—and at last I made out some words coming from directly above me.

"Oh, it is terrible!—terrible! Has he ever been wounded so badly before?"

"Yes, Madam, yes, to be sure," came gruffly from my side. "A little more steady, Madam, if you please, or the drip from the candle will strike him. Thank you, that is better."

"But can he, *can he* live with that great cut in his poor side? And he fought so nobly, when he could scarce lift—lift his sword." A hot drop fell upon my cheek.

I groaned as I tried to open my eyes, but could not.

Toby cleared his throat very noisily. "Yes, Madam, he'll soon recover. He's been cut up worse than this, and been in the saddle twelve hours after. You've saved the best gentleman in the world, Madam,—that's what you have done,—and I never can—repay the—the debt I owe you, Madam." Again he cleared his throat roughly, after which a great tearing of linen took place.

"Thank—thank God if I have!" Another hot drop fell upon my cheek.

This was strange, monstrous strange, that any

one would weep over me! Tears never before had fallen for Mark Everard! Tears for Mark Everard, whose sword was the father of more curses than prayers! For Mark Everard, the swaggering adventurer and duellist! Preposterous! Zooks! they seemed to steal what I always had considered my manhood. 'Twas necessary that they should cease.

"Pardon, Madam," I muttered, struggling with a great drowsiness that was stealing over me, "but do —not be troubled—for me. Your own position—causes me—much more anxiety—than this—scratch. Pray, be composed;—in the morning—I shall—be well,—and shall—continue—where to-night—I so miserably—have—failed."

I felt her body shake with a smothered sob,—and then I knew for the first time that my head was resting in her lap.

Toby tied on his temporary bandages while I spoke. "There," he said suddenly, "fetch me that chair."

Two men, of whose presence I had not known, hastened forward with the arm-chair.

"No, not that!" I gasped. "No chair—for me! You would think—me a——" I had intended to say "woman," but the thought of the noble lady beside me suddenly checked my tongue.

"A what?" she whispered, bending down until her soft hair swept my cheeks.

My mood favoured confession. "I was about to

say—'woman,' but after—this night—the word has —a different—meaning." Waves of sleep rushed into my head.

"And you are a hero," she whispered.

And then I floated off through billowy space.

CHAPTER XV.

THE sun was shining brightly across the foot of my bed, and chasing elusive little shadows thrown from the leaves of the tree beside the window. Up and down, across and back, ran the shadows, the golden spots ever at their heels, but never quite catching their subtile prey. The chase became interesting, then almost exciting, and finally bewildering, as the little dark spots dodged, vanished and reappeared, constantly on the move, darting hither and thither, weaving fantastic designs with their intermingled ways. One large spot finally caught my eye. He was more interesting than his fellows. There was more dignity in his movements, more grace in the way he avoided the thrusts of the golden blade that followed him, and more regularity in his course. Back and forth he moved, making no effort to avoid his little comrades. He trampled them under foot without a halt or apparent compunction. Sometimes he came to the middle of the bed, stopped and retraced his steps; sometimes he went all the way across, then wandered back and partly crossed the floor; sometimes he rushed in haste across the bed with a speed that forced him up the wall. Zooks! 'twas a contest of no little spirit. I blinked and

watched every move. Then he was almost quiet for a time; he moved lazily back and forth across the bed, the ray fencing easily and waiting a good opening. I held my breath lest I should frighten them away. Presently, without a moment's warning, the ray sprang forward. Back jumped the shadow, rushed up the wall, doubled beautifully and sprang to the floor without a sound.

"Mighty well done, my boy!" I approved.

"Oh!" came a little startled cry from beside me, and a book fell to the floor.

I turned my head toward the spot whence the exclamation had come,—and caught my breath in surprise. There, seated in the arm-chair from the hall below, sat Mistress Heron, her face a little pale and her eyes wide with surprise, as she stared at me as though I had been a ghost. I blinked and rubbed my eyes to make sure that I was not dreaming. It was no dream. There she sat, her hands clasped before her, her lips parted just enough to show a row of shining pearls, and her bosom moving quickly. Her whole pose bespoke alarm or deep anxiety. The situation was—to say the least—most unusual and perplexing.

"Will you take some wine?" she asked very quietly, putting her hand upon my forehead.

"Zooks!" I muttered to myself, "am I mad?" Aloud I said: "Really, Madam, I—I—this is—well—I don't quite understand." I felt like a fool,

and feared lest I should betray my madness by my speech.

"There, there; you must not talk," she warned.

"Must not talk?" I puzzled, as she stepped to the table and poured out a brimming glass of wine. "Zooks! what a woman!" I whispered within me, as she came smilingly to the bedside, her finger to her lip—a warning that I was not to speak.

"Now you must be very good and try obedience, merely as a change. My first order is: you must not talk nor move. 'Twill be difficult to obey me, I know, but I must be very severe. At the first move from you, I shall cry:—Halt! But I shall not apologise for saying it, as a friend of mine did, 'once upon a time,' as the fable says."

"A friend of mine," I repeated, and a thrill ran through me as she inserted her slender fingers between my head and the pillow, attempting to raise me that I might drink of the wine.

I raised myself quickly to my elbow,—but uttered an exclamation as a pain shot through me.

"Oh, how independent we are!" she cried. "But you must not do that. And I scarcely had finished telling you not to move."

"But——"

"Silence, Sir! Dear, dear! you break my every order the moment I give it. Now drink."

A second command was not necessary, for my tongue was parched.

"I thank you so, so much," I smiled as she took the glass from me. "You are so good. But——"

She put her hand over my mouth. "I like praise, but I must stop you when you commence to find fault. The moment you say 'but,' my hand shall go over your mouth."

A reply came to my lips, but I checked it as I thought of her position and saint-like kindness. "Zounds!" I muttered, "this is no woman; she is an angel! The form and face of a goddess, a heart all kindness, a hero's courage, and a sweet native innocence walking hand in hand with a rare knowledge!" I closed my eyes that she might not misinterpret the admiration shining in them. Such kindness was beyond my understanding. And to have it come from a woman, but made it all the more remarkable. For I always had thought of them as witless, thoughtless, soulless creatures that thought of naught but power, intrigue and the gratification of vanity. My very ignorance of them had made me to think I knew them. I had thought them all of a feather, from the barmaid to the princess, differing but in degree and opportunity. Alas, alas! how far, how absurdly far, from the wholesome truth!

The wine now began to revive my memory. "What time is it?" I asked.

"Between five and six o'clock."

"Between five and six! And in the afternoon?"

"Now, now, now, do be calm! There is no cause for such excitement!"

"But——"

"Tut, tut, tut! Have I not warned you against using that word? If you will obey me and remain quiet, I shall tell you all, otherwise, I shall vanish and leave your disobedient mind in darkness. Make your choice, Sir."

"You have me at your mercy; I must surrender," I smiled.

"At last!" She clapped her hands. "This is indeed a victory. Now listen.

"When Toby and two of your guardsmen carried you here from the hall below, the little man at once went to take care of that—that hateful beast, Lord Cadwaller. Toby took him to his room, locked the door and put the key in his pocket. Then he returned to his master, whom he made very comfortable. After that, he commanded me to repeat a very pretty story to all the servants—which I did, word for word, at his dictation. The story was, in effect, that the Earl of Cadwaller had carried me off at sunrise this morning. To be sure, the sun had not risen when I told them of my departure, but they were made fully to understand."

"But what——?" I puzzled.

"Halt, Sir! Not another move!" She glanced threateningly toward the door—and my head sank back upon the pillow.

"Then Toby ordered me to bed, and I obeyed with a meekness surprising. His order was that I should not leave my room until he should give me permission. Some hours after I retired I was awakened by a tramping of feet beneath my window, and this was immediately followed by a vast lot of talking in rough voices. Men then entered the house, came up stairs, slammed doors, swore, and finally departed.

About half an hour after this I heard them mount and ride off. I waited in an agony of suspense until Toby at last came to my door and told me all danger was past for the present."

"Yes, yes!—and who are they?"

"Servants of his Lordship who lay bound and gagged in his room." She laughed softly. "You may well be proud of your little Toby, for never before were master and man so well suited."

"But the coach and coachman? Did not Cadwaller's servant come with the others? And did he not seek the coach?"

"Dear, dear! you do Toby scant justice. The coach was driven through the gateway, that the tracks might be seen turning into the road; from there it was driven some miles and re-entered the park by the rear gate; the horses were tied in an unfrequented place among the trees—and lo, all traces of my Lord had disappeared."

"Except the coachman."

"Excepting the coachman, whom Toby at once

treated as he had already treated the Earl. Yes, yes, you may well be proud of Toby; he is a little genius!" She clapped her hands and laughed like a child.

"And Cadwaller?" I asked.

"His gag and bonds have been removed, but he remains locked in his room, swearing profusely, but quite harmless. Oh, I have an interesting household!"

There was a pause for some time, as I formed the question I was about to ask. "And your father?" I said presently.

A shadow passed over her face, and she raised her eyes and looked steadily at the wall while she answered. "Yes, I know. Poor old father! For years he has dreaded such an end. A few months ago he had one of those terrible strokes, and he said then that he could not survive another. Believe me, Sir, I feel sorrow for his death, for he was my father, with all his failings. I do not think he ever loved me, but he was very proud, and wished to see me in a high position. He never rightly understood me, and his harshness was due to the fact that he considered me regardless of his wishes and perverse in my ideals. I could not help it. I am as I was born; neither better nor worse. It is not my fault that I hate courts, pomp and all that so many think the crown of all ambition. I know I have many faults; but surely I am not wrong in everything. My poor

father mistook my failings for deliberate attacks upon his judgment." She shook her head sadly. "I know my faults, but I am as I was made, and no power in the world—not even if it took my life—could ever have forced me to gratify his wish concerning Lord Cadwaller." Her eyes slowly filled with tears. "He died before his dearest wish was defeated. Though I feel sorrow for his death, and though it may be unnatural in me to say so, I believe it is better so—God forgive me if I am to blame!" She turned her face from me, and her body shook with a suppressed sobbing.

I said nothing, but lay still, watching the beautiful, bent form. She was right. She was real. Here was no senseless affectation such as one might expect from even a fairly honest person in the same circumstances. I had noted her father's shameless harsh treatment of his noble daughter before strangers, and doubted not that it was even more unkind when they were alone. Her plain outspokenness was unusual, doubtless, but to me it was incomparably more commandable than false demonstrations of a regret that could not be felt. Under the circumstances, a heartbroken sorrow would have been mere idle show—the conventionality of a weaker soul. Doubtless she knew nothing of Sir Alfred's sudden turning from Cadwaller, when he had been made aware of the degradation the latter had planned for him. But this could have no decided effect upon

Sir Alfred's character. His sudden hatred for the Earl was caused, not by any feeling of affection for his daughter, but by the insult offered to his pride.

Presently she looked up, wiping her eyes. "I have confessed to you, Sir; now tell me if I am very wicked."

My voice shook a little as I answered. "You are the only honest woman I ever have met. Your feelings are, under the circumstances, perfectly natural, and far more commendable than the display of an overwhelming sorrow that you could not sincerely feel. But I may tell you, for the purpose of removing your regret that you may have for the necessity of disobeying your parent's command, that your father denounced Cadwaller for the villain he is, and with almost his last breath prayed me to save you from him."

"Did he? Did he?" Her eyes opened wide with glad surprise.

"He did, when I made clear to him the scoundrel's object, which would cast disgrace upon himself."

"Oh!" she cried, then added: "But it gives me relief to know that his curse rests not upon me, without regard to what was the reason for his sudden change." Her face and neck were covered with blushes, and she rose and went to the window to hide the evidences of conflicting emotions.

I kept silence for some time, watching her standing in the sunlight and sorrowfully gazing forth.

"Alone," I murmured. "Alone in the world. Alone in a cage of savage beasts, who lick their slavering chops and, over-gorged, turned from half-eaten prey to coax their appetites with a new and sweeter victim. Oh, God!" I groaned within my heart, "what can I do to save her? Cadwaller is but one, and she shall be unprotected from others of his kind when I am gone. When I am gone!" The thought caused a pang of sorrow. "But not yet," I whispered. "Much is left to be accomplished—much!" The seriousness of the situation came back to me with a startling force. "Zounds! and here I lie while the precious moments hasten past. Her peril is greater than ever! The devil take this stiffened side! I must be moving! Ease and contentment are robbing me of my perseverance, my determination!"

"Madam," I said aloud, "have you any blood relation near at hand?"

She turned quickly, catching her breath in surprise at my abruptness.

"Oh, yes! I have an aunt in Canterbury." She looked at me strangely and drew nearer. "Why?" she asked quietly.

"Your father's or your mother's sister?"

"My mother's. But why do you ask?" Her eyes were anxious, and she came yet nearer, doubt-

less wondering at the sudden look of resolved action in my face.

"Is her husband living?" I went on.

"Yes, yes! But why are you so excited? You must be calm."

"Your aunt and her husband must be sent for at once—or better, you should go to them."

"But you?—and my father?"

"Ah true! I forgot your father. Still, if you have time, you must go."

"Have time? What do you mean? Pray be calm!" She looked at me closely, evidently thinking my mind wandering.

"Calm! I am calm! But you must leave this place as soon as possible. What time were they here?"

"Who?"

"Cadwaller's men!"

"About seven this morning. But please do not excite yourself."

"Excite myself! My dear lady, Toby must be a fool! Seven o'clock, you say? And now it is near to six in the afternoon! They have had almost eleven hours! We may expect them at any moment!"

She wrung her hands perplexedly. "You, you must lie down and be more calm—you really must!"

"Nay, Madam, I must now move more quickly than ever before. Too much good time already has

been wasted! You must be in Canterbury this night, and I must be in Dover!"

"Oh, Sir, Sir! you must be more restful. What you say is impossible, impossible!" She looked at me steadily, her expression slowly changing." How forgetful in me!" she cried. "You have had nothing to eat! 'Tis shameful so to drive you mad with hunger makes you so disobedient." She shook a promise me that you will be good, very good, and I shall fetch you your breakfast. Poor man! 'tis hunger makes you so disobedient." She shook a finger at me in mock severity. "Promise that you will be good, and not attempt to rise."

I could not help smiling, despite the danger that I scented fast approaching. "And will my reward be obedience from you after?"

Her eyes opened wide with surprise.

"Will you obey me and go to Canterbury?"

I thought I saw a shadow pass over her face; and I wondered at it. If it did pass, it was gone in a moment, for she laughed almost immediately.

"Yes, I promise—after. But your present reward will be breakfast—a delicious breakfast." She shut her eyes and shook her head. "Oh, it will be very, very nice!" She bowed her head and watched me from under her raised brow. "You never have eaten a meal of my preparing. Oh, they are delicious!" She joined my laughter, and skipped to the door. "I hope I

have sharpened your appetite sufficiently," she laughed as she passed out.

"You have made me ravenous! You are a witch!" I cried.

She put her lovely laughing face back into the room for a moment. "Now, remember: good, good, good!" And, frowning in mock severity, and shaking her finger at each repetition, she vanished.

"Oh," I heard her say in the passage, "you are in good time, Toby; your master is awake, and wants you, I think. See to it, Toby, that he breaks not my orders, which are that he shall not move from where he lies."

Toby's reply came to me as an indistinct rumble, and a moment later his rap came at the door

"Come in, Toby!" I called.

He was covered with dust from head to foot, his face red from exertion, his habitual frown deeper than usual, and he pulled at his mustaches almost savagely.

'Twas my intention to give him a sharp lecture for permitting me to sleep away hours of most vital importance, but his troubled look checked me, and I said only: "Yes?"

"Escaped, Sir—Cadwaller's coachman," he jerked out abruptly.

"Ah!" With a great effort I sprang upright.

"Almost five hours since. Followed him to Canterbury—was half-an-hour behind him. Took

the Dover road—I followed. Too late; he had entered the town fifteen minutes before I reached the outskirts."

"The devil! How do you know?"

"Asked at an inn he had passed a mile this side of the town."

"Quick, Toby—help me to dress!"

"But your wound, Sir!"

"The devil take me and my wound, if Mistress Heron does not reach Canterbury in safety! And I shall see the King this night if I have to crawl! Haste! Have no fear of hurting me; I deserve it."

My whole left side was stiff and sore, my shoulder and hip were severely bruised, and the cut over my ribs was feverish and pained sharply with my every move. My head swam lightly as I put my feet to the floor, and my knees shook treacherously when my weight came upon my legs. 'Twas no new experience to me; I well knew the symptoms, and made no doubt that they soon would become less annoying when I should move around more. Once or twice I came near falling, but Toby's arm was ready. He gave me a glass of wine now and again, and I felt my strength revive.

"Friends there, Sir?" Toby asked abruptly, as he slowly worked me into my coat, from which the blood had neatly been removed, and the gash stitched until it was scarcely visible.

"Yes, Toby; an aunt. We must take Mistress Heron there, then I shall see the King, and arrange matters so as to free her from further persecution. See—her work." I pointed to the mended rent. "All kindness. How many ladies of her standing would give so much as a thought to a poor devil with a gash in his ribs? There, Toby, is a real woman. Those that we have been sneering at for years are counterfeits. The quality is not in them. You remember our compact, my friend? She must be saved. She must reach Canterbury in safety, Toby." I griped his arm and stared fiercely at him.

He returned my look strangely, his brows wrinkled in trouble. "Yes, Sir; or fight it out here." His jaws closed tightly, and I should swear his hand shook as he lifted my boot and drew it on.

When Toby's hand shook the chance of success was one in a thousand, I knew. My heart almost stopped as I thought of what the result would be should Cadwaller's friends return before we could leave, or if they should meet us on the road. The road to Canterbury is the road from Dover. Well might Toby's hand shake;—our chance of success was indeed but one in a thousand.

This new excitement—the escape of Cadwaller's coachman—had driven from my mind all thought of the daring scoundrel of the night before, the knave to whom I owed my disability. But every detail of the foul attempt at assassination came to me in a

flash, when Toby placed my sword-belt upon my shoulder. The hilt of my weapon was bent a little where I had fallen upon it.

"Ah! did you get him?" I asked with a suddenness and force that made Toby start back in surprise and stare in wonder.

"The coachman, Sir?"

"No, no, no! The knave of last night—the man in black, with whom I fell from the window!"

"Oh! No, Sir, I didn't get him. I missed him with the pistol, and though I followed amongst the trees for some time, 'twas so dark I lost him."

"Had he aught to do with the escape of the coachman?"

"I think not, Sir. I think he was in another place when the coachman escaped."

"Then you have an idea who he is?"

"Only an idea, Sir; but I think we both have seen him before."

I pulled my mustaches thoughtfully, while Toby drew on my other boot. "Yes, Toby, I agree with you. I believe we have seen him before. And if I mistake not, we shall see him again. And yet, I have no reason for my belief that he is the man."

Toby looked up quickly and eyed me in half surprise. "I think I understand his reason, Sir." He nodded knowingly.

"Yes?"

"Yes, Sir; but, pardon me, Sir, I shall not tell it just now."

"Oh, you are growing very deep, Toby," I said dryly, for his words intimated a suspicion that I also had of the masqued man's reason for the attempted assassination.

"Is Cadwaller safe?" I questioned, rising painfully, and, with my hand upon Toby's shoulder, moving toward the door.

"Yes, Sir. I left a man on guard before his door, and one beneath his window, when I started in pursuit of the coachman.

"Ah, that is well, Toby. You learned caution after the other had escaped."

"Yes, Sir." His face was flushed, but he was not one to shirk responsibility.

As we left the room I heard the rattle of dishes in the hall below.

"Quick, Toby," I whispered; "give orders to have the coach made ready at once; then eat, for you must be weary. When the coach is ready, let me know at once. Have it to stand in some convenient spot, not visible from the drives, house or stables. Relieve the guardsmen of their duty, and have them mounted and ready by the coach."

"Yes, Sir." He turned and sped along the hall toward the back stairs.

I made a great effort and, straightening myself as

much as possible, stepped firmly in the direction of the approaching rattle of dishes.

"Don't be alarmed," I called, as I neared the head of the stairs. "I am not a ghost."

"Oh!" I heard her cry;—and the next moment I stood before her, smiling down into her wondering face.

"I didn't promise," I pleaded, as I saw that she was about to speak.

"But you gave me to understand that you would obey."

"You must forgive me. I was forced to use diplomacy to gain my end; there was no time for elaborate argument."

"In the morning-room," she directed, turning to the staring servant that carried the tray.

"I shall postpone your lecture, you wicked man, until your strength shall have become sufficient to bear it."

I laughed, and grasped the balustrade for support, for my legs were attempting to play me false. But she saw I was acting, for she took my arm, despite my protests, and steadied my trembling steps.

"'Tis a shame, a sorry shame, to so tempt death," she reproved.

"On the contrary, I am doing my utmost to avoid it. 'Tis from death I would save myself, and from worse I would save you. Do you not know that Cadwaller's coachman has escaped?"

"Escaped!—No!—When?"

"Hours since. He has gone to Dover. Cadwaller's friends that were here this morning, although they would have returned without the warning, when they discovered that they had been duped, will now be upon us the sooner!"

"But what shall you do?"

We entered the breakfast-room, and I sank into a chair at the table. "We leave for Canterbury the moment the coach shall be ready."

"But you are not able to travel!"

I laughed. "I'm worth a dozen dead men, Madam; and when I shall have finished with this repast—Zooks! I shall be worth at least one quick one. Pardon my unseemly haste, but every moment is precious."

She sat sipping her wine and nibbling a piece of cake, her large unfathomable eyes watching me with a strange unreadable expression.

"And if they come before we leave?" she asked.

"I have given orders to have the coach hidden amongst the trees. 'Tis possible we may reach it unobserved;—if not——"

"If not?"

"Why, then, we must fight it out. I have Toby and the three guardsmen—one of whom is wounded, to be sure—but even he has a sound sword-arm."

"You fight!" She put down her glass and stared

at me in wonder. "Sir, Sir!—you can scarce lift your wine-glass! 'Twould cost your life to strike a blow! No, no, I will not permit it! I am the cause of your present suffering. I have been very selfish in permitting you to expose yourself to such great dangers already. I shall go to the King and demand honourable treatment. Thank God there is still a Parliament in the land, and King Charles cannot so soon have forgotten the fate of his lawless father!"

Zounds! she made a splendid and heart-thrilling picture, with her beautiful head held high, her red lips firm, and her dark eyes emitting sparks of noble courage and resolve.

I smiled and shook my head. "Your object would be to save me, but you could not succeed. Noble lady," I said, leaning forward and speaking very low, "I thank you much, oh, so much more than I ever can tell you, for your sweet generosity and tender kindness!" (She dropped her eyes, and the blushes came and went, in little, rosy waves.) "Last night you displayed a courage greater far than ever woman has shown before. You saved my life. And shall I fail now in the task that I had determined to accomplish even before you made me a hundred times your debtor?—No; or if I do, my ears then shall be deafened to the tale of shame. You shall escape Cadwaller,—and to-night I shall see the King."

"But why should I not succeed?" she flashed, raising her determined face.

"Even then I should be compelled to fight if they should come."

The colour left her face. "And how will you see the King?" she almost whispered, leaning forward.

"I shall go to him at Dover, and have a quiet talk with his Majesty."

"Yes. And what, think you, will be your reception if he knows of your treatment of his puppet above-stairs? Remember also that you have disobeyed his order to go to London."

"I have a very persuasive way of talking, which I shall bring to bear upon his Majesty."

"No, you shall not. It is my duty to see the King, demand justice, and I will receive it!"

I shook my head. "Such a course would ruin all. Last night you said you trusted in me. Will you not trust still? Your greatest trial is at hand. Permit me to guide you through."

She buried her face in her hands and sat silent.

I heard Toby's step hastening along the hall. He rapped and entered, still wiping his mustaches. His belt was filled with pistols. "All ready, Sir."

"May we succeed," I said solemnly, standing with raised glass.

The lady followed my example.

"One moment," she said, gliding from the room.

I went to the window, swung it open and looked forth. 'Twas very quiet amongst the trees, and the long shadow cast from the house stretched lazily down the three terraces to where the circling drives join and wind toward the gate—the gate that Julius kept. A chill ran through me as the name came to my mind. "Julius, the fiend that haunts my sleep," I muttered. "Julius, whose very name conjures up evil." My side burned and throbbed warningly, and I shuddered as I half closed the window.

"Hark! Toby, what is that?"

The little man sprang to my side, his hand at his ear. I held my breath and listened. The beating of horses' hoofs upon a hard road came faintly rolling through the trees. The sound quickly grew in volume—the beasts were rushing on at their greatest speed.

"How many, Toby?"

"Only four or five, Sir, I think."

Mistress Heron reëntered, ready for the road. "What is it?" she cried.

"They are here, Madam. There, they are slackening speed as they approach the gate."

"By the rear entrance, Sir?" Toby asked.

I nodded, seized my hat, and held the door while the lady proudly passed out.

"Ha!" I muttered, "no fear there. I believe she would rather fight than flee!" But my heart beat quickly as I followed her.

"Julius, Julius, Julius!" rang in my ears as a warning.

CHAPTER XVI.

Toby attempted to take my arm, but I motioned him off. My legs still felt unreliable, and I wished by use to prepare them for an emergency. The little man then rushed ahead, and, crossing the main hall, opened a door and ran down a passage leading to a rear entrance. We followed briskly, though my teeth were clenched with the pain of my wounded side. With every step it caught me and made my breath come short. The lady watched me anxiously, as though she thought to see me fall. Therefore I stepped the firmer, and put on as much swing as my stiffness would permit.

A sudden beating of hoofs trembled through the house. I gasped in surprise and sprang forward.

"Quick, Toby! They must have passed the gates! How came they so soon?"

"Too late, I fear," said Mistress Heron, as Toby reached the door.

The clatter rushed quickly on, coming with a distinctness surprising. Toby swung the door open, ground his teeth, and slammed it shut again. "Trapped!" he growled, and shot the bolt.

"How?"

"Another band coming up the rear drive! They're almost here!"

"Ah! I thought it too soon for the others. How many are without?"

"Four, Sir, I counted. There, they are in the court-yard."

"Only four? Come, unbolt!"

"Hark!" said the lady. She was leaning against the wall, her fingers held to her chin, her lips apart, keenly listening.

Toby paused, his hand upon the bolt. Another clatter of hoofs, less distinct than the first, came to us down the hall.

"Ah, the others! Haste!"

"No!" cried the lady, very white, but with sparkling eyes.

I loosened my sword, but still hesitated, for in her face was a look of almost hope. "Yes?" I questioned, while the beating hoofs rushed nearer, and loud voices from the court-yard.

"I have a plan! It may work! Oh, for the night! Follow me!" she jerked out sharply, and started back toward the great hall.

Toby looked inquiringly at me. I nodded. We turned and followed, wondering.

The sound of rushing horses suddenly ceased; then came a knocking at the main door.

"Worse than we expected, eh, Toby?" I whispered. "Now we must fight it out alone. Our guardsmen are useless."

"Haste!" called Mistress Heron, beckoning from

half way up the passage, where she stood beside a narrow door. "I shall lead the way. 'Tis dark. Follow, and make no noise."

She swung the door open and disappeared in the darkness. Toby and I followed softly. As I turned to close the door a great bustle and clamouring of voices came to me from the great hall. I searched for a bolt or bar, while the shouts and running grew louder, but found neither.

"Come," our fair guide whispered from the blackness below. "This way. Haste!"

"But the door! There is no bolt."

"Oh, the key, the key! Here, Toby, here!"

The door from the main hall to the passage flew open, and some one dashed along the passage. I heard him draw back the bolt, and a moment later he was shouting to his comrades in the court-yard. Toby passed a ring of keys to me, that of the door singled out; but as I was trying to insert it the fellow returned, and with him was another. I held my breath and listened, fearing to put key to lock lest they should hear the rattle. Directly before the door they halted.

"What does he say?" asked one, as a fellow without shouted something that I could not catch.

"What?" bellowed the second speaker, starting back toward the door.

"Sammy says the coach is gone," came from the court-yard.

"The devil!" They hastily went back, and another fellow rushed down the passage from the main hall, shouting after them.

"There's only the dead man in one of the rooms! Not a sight of our master!"

I took advantage of the uproar by inserting and turning the key.

"Someone opened this door as we came up the road. I saw him," said one.

"Was it a man?"

"Yes, a man. I saw him plain. Yes, he was a little devil. His head didn't come above here on the door. And he wore hair on his face. I saw him plain."

"That's him! That's him!" cried another. "That's the little curse that tied me up and near smothered me!" (Toby's sins were finding him out.) "Come on, let's find them. They must be in the house."

"But the coach is gone—his Lordship's coach."

"So it was before," said a rougher voice. "They can't fool us that way again. Come along."

"What's that?"

A great pounding rolled through the house. Where we were it came faintly, but its vigour, which carried it so far, could not be mistaken. Thump, thump, thump! it came. Then I heard a great shouting in the distance, and this was followed by a rush and answering shouts from the men, until the

whole house was made to echo with sounds as of mad creatures let loose.

"Ah, his Lordship is attracting attention," I said, groping my way down the steps.

"I should have finished him last night," Toby growled. "When you throw away a trick you often lose the game.

"But sometimes get a better suit."

"This way," came from our leader.

We followed her whispered directions, feeling along the wall to guide us. My hand brushed across three doors, and then a soft "Here" came through the darkness, and the fourth door opened gently. My hand slid along, found the casing, and I followed Toby into a darkness thicker, if that was possible, than that of the passage along which we had been groping.

"Wait here," the lady said, closing the door and moving farther into the darkness. A clink of glass came to me a moment later, and I heard her moving about, her hands feeling here and there, as though searching for something upon the table.

Crash, crash, crash! came from far above,—and I knew that the Earl was attaining his liberty. Click, click, click! came from a few yards distant,—and I knew for what Mistress Heron had sought. I moved toward her when I saw the flash, and a moment later held a lighted candle, while she put down

the flint and steel, and, taking the ring of keys, crossed to the door and locked it.

"Now," she said, standing straight, her back against the panel, an odd smile of half-excitement, half-triumph upon her face; "now we still have a chance."

I stood gazing at her in admiration—Zounds! she commanded it—and Toby leaned against the wall, twisting his mustaches and watching her from under his shaggy brows with eyes that twinkled merrily.

"I believe this is more to your liking than to flee, Madam," I smiled.

"The pugnacious spirit is contagious, Sir," she laughed back. "I have caught it."

The crashing above-stairs suddenly ceased, then silence reigned for a moment, but it was followed in turn by a loud and angry shouting, which, I made no doubt, was well punctuated with oaths. A sudden running down the stairs followed. Many feet made the sounds, and they came with a rush that left no doubt of their determination to secure their prey—a pack of fierce staghounds chasing a tender fawn. The tramping of feet and shouting came nearer. As they reached the ground floor I could plainly distinguish the voice of his Lordship cursing most foully and calling out orders for our apprehension.

"Out, out, you silly fools! Surround the house!

While you stand staring, they, doubtless, are making off! Two men to each gate, you blockheads! Yes, mounted, of course! Haste! they may have left the grounds already! Fire a pistol if you sight them!" More rushing of feet followed this outburst, and presently came a galloping of horses, as the men hastened to carry out their master's directions.

I began to cast about for something with which to make ourselves more secure, for, remember, there were but two doors between our foes and us, and stout ones though they were, locks can easily be pistoled, as I already have shown, and the keep of a bolt can be forced. This search for reënforcements brought the strangeness of the room under my notice. It was fairly large, almost square, and wainscoted in oak to a height of about six feet, and above this was another five or six feet to the floor of the room across which Cadwaller strode and stormed. But the strange part was its contents. A large and heavy table stood in the centre, and upon this were many tubes and globes of glass, a little brass kettle and a mortar with pestle. In the wall was the common fireplace, but beside it, upon a higher piece of stonework, was a second one, very small—"a young one," as Toby said—with a hood-shaped piece from the main chimney projecting over it. In neither of these did a fire burn, and the ashes upon the hearth were old and cold. Here and there along

the walls were shelves upon which stood many bottles, each having a name stuck to it, and one shelf there was that held books, mostly large and well thumbed. Scattered in disorder about the room were pots and other utensils, strange-shaped and of various sizes, and at one end of the table a stool—the only seat that the room contained.

"Ah, an alchemist!" I hinted, forgetting how distinct Cadwaller's voice had sounded.

"Sh!" the lady warned, looking up.

A conversation was progressing above-stairs, but not within the room directly overhead. "Ha! When?" cried the Earl. The other's answer came as a murmur. "That is well! That is well! Then they must still be within the house! Go fetch me a servant—the first you find!" Steps started quickly, and soon died out in the distance, as the man hastened toward the other wing.

"Do the servants know of this place?" I whispered.

She thought a moment. "Yes, they must know of it, but none has ever been within—at least, none but Julius."

"None but Julius!" Again that hated name rang menacingly in my ears.

"He has assisted my father here sometimes. Julius is the only one now, besides myself, that knows its secret."

"Its secret?"

"Yes." She smiled and nodded knowingly.

"And can Julius hold a secret fast?"

"To the death."

"I should prefer that he now held it *in* death," I muttered.

"But if the doors are not fastened, may not the other servants know also?"

"The doors always are locked, Sir." She still was smiling.

"Always?" I questioned, knowing that she had not used her keys to open either but a moment before.

"Last night I took my poor father's keys and came down here for a balm for the wound of a poor gentleman that had come near to death in saving my life. I was sore wrought, and so forgot to lock the doors again."

"And you came alone?" I said, very low. "Brave heart!" came to my lips, but I smothered the words lest she should think them over-bold.

"I—I was a little, only a little, afraid. I thought I heard a noise behind the wall, there, when I entered. I suppose it was the result of that awful excitement in the hall. But whatever it was, imagination or not, I did not take time to relock the door."

My throat ached fiercely. "Here is a woman! Here is a woman!" I stifled within me. "After having gone through what she went through last night—if another woman lives that would go

through it—there is not a woman in a million that would come to this place alone, when an unknown assassin was lurking still about the house." I clenched my fists, stared at the floor, and my breath came heavily through my nose.

"A noise behind the wall? Which wall, Madam?" I whispered.

She seemed surprised by the question. "That wall." She indicated the one to her left.

"Ah!" I tiptoed to it and placed my ear against the panels. "Is there a room beyond?"

"No,—not a room. Why?"

"Then I, too, must have been deceived."

"Deceived! Did you hear a sound?" She flew to my side and placed her ear where I had held mine. "Oh, no! there could be no one there. What you heard must have come from above-stairs."

"Surely—since there is nothing beyond the wall," I assented.

"But there is." She was frowning thoughtfully.

"A chamber?"

"No; a passage.

"Ah, that is the secret!"

"Yes. But there could be no one there."

"Yet Julius knows." Once again my jaws clenched in sudden anger at the name.

"Poor Julius! You think he is capable of any villainy. Do you remember the morning when you compared him with his namesake, the fish?"

"I remember," I whispered, looking at the floor.

"Even then you were sadly prejudiced. Remember?"

"Always!"

Toby was inspecting the bottles upon the shelves at the other side of the room; Cudwaller, above, was questioning the servants severely, for now and again his voice raised very high would come to us; and a banging of doors and a tramping of feet came indistinctly from the second floor, where his Lordship's men had commenced their systematic search, room by room, from garret to cellar.

"And you have not changed?"

"Changed!" I gasped.

"Yes. You still hold to your prejudice?" Her eyes had an unreadable laughing expression.

"Oh!" I sighed, reassured and disappointed. "Yes, I still believe he is a fiend—yea, further, I am convinced."

I saw Toby turn and cast a hasty glance at me.

"And yesterday you were about to slay me, after having beaten the poor creature almost to death. How murderous you did look when you turned, with that great sword drawn back to run through poor little me!" Her eyes were sparkling temptingly, and her dark red lips twitched with a tantalizing smile.

I leaned against the wall and trembled, a strange

wild tingling rushing through my veins, twitching my fingers and dancing in my heart.

"And again you would have killed him, when as a spectator he peered over the hedge, watching you fight Lord Cadwaller. And all this hatred because the poor fellow is attempting to do what he considers his duty! To him you are a very wicked man, who came, backed by a band of the King's soldiers, to carry me off. Oh, you forget what a wicked man you were when you came, scarcely two weeks ago! And now you expect him to betray me!" She shook her head. "'Tis his ugly face that makes you to hate him so, I fear. Betray me! Why the poor hideous creature almost worships me!"

Toby made a sudden movement, but when we glanced toward him he still stared at the bottles, his back to us.

"He is on very intimate terms with Sir Charles, Madam."

"Sir Charles Rawley?"

"He admitted Sir Charles to the grounds last night, and the two had a whispered conference before the latter left. I think Sir Charles has more to do with the close attention I receive from Julius than has his duty to you, Madam."

"Oh!" she gasped, and was silent for a moment. "So, so! Another—another puppet! Did you speak with him?"

"Ay. Toby took him prisoner, and we discussed many things."

"And did you learn aught of his mission?"

"Ay. He came that he might give orders to his men to detain his Lordship as long as possible."

Her face flushed darkly, and she bit her lip in anger. "More plotting! And I am the innocent cause of it all! Oh, God! am I but a thing to be bought and sold by scheming knaves for their advancement? Am I not a woman, and have I no will, that I must be made into a stepping-stone, a filthy stepping-stone for honourless beasts to trample under muddy feet? A thing without feeling, honour, or soul? Ah, Sir, you have thought me ignorant of that dog Cadwaller's plans! I was not. I suspected them, though I was uncertain until you spoke this day. Oh, Heaven! And here's another puppet, smaller and more contemptible! This is the Little Duke's little dog, I suppose! Oh, oh! it is too, *too* shameful! Am I nothing—nothing? Why am I singled out for such vile, such unspeakable shame, such torment? Have I no heart, no—no love to be considered? Oh! what am I saying?" She broke off abruptly, buried her burning face in her hands and shook with a violent sobbing.

Toby leaned against the great chimney, his brows drawn down until his eyes were but points of fire burning through a forest of shaggy hair, his mouth a grim, straight line, mustaches bristling like

a mad dog's back, and nostrils opening and closing like a fish's gills. I stood burning and freezing alternately, my heart leaping and standing still, afire and turned to ice. Zounds! what a woman! No words can do her justice, nor from what she said can her look be judged. She was a furnace of burning indignation, a goddess of noble beauty wronged. At her last words my heart stood still, an icy hand clutched it until I groaned, and a cold moisture burst out upon my face. "Have I no heart, no love to be considered?" she had cried. Ah! she loved. Farewell, sweet folly, dear absurdity! Mark Everard, the duellist, the adventurer, the hireling of princes and kings, would now fall back into the pit of reality, which he never should have left. Old Toby was right. Toby was a wise man—and a fool. And where was this lover, this god that he must be to win the love of such a woman? Where was he, that he left her in such straits? The poltroon! If the outcast Mark Everard had him in his hands he would flay him alive for his neglect! If the outcast, the poor despised outcast—no, no!—ungenerous thought—the honoured, the vastly honoured, soldier should meet him, he would kiss his hand, for he must have a grand soul ere he could win such love. "Oh, God!" I choked, and trembled against the wall. My side malignantly burned and stabbed; my brain giddily throbbed and whirled; my ears were deaf, but provokingly rang and whis-

tled. . . . A warmth that felt suspiciously like a fever began to steal through my veins. . . .

Toby moved. Toby was tiptoeing toward the door. Toby held up a hand in warning—and I made out a sound in the passage above, a sound as of someone carefully making his way along toward the little door through which we had passed in coming to the late Sir Alfred's secret chamber. At the door the cautious steps stopped. I heard someone try the lock. Then there was silence for several moments, during which time Mistress Heron wiped her eyes and regained her self-command.

"Ah! In the cellar, my lady!" Twas Lord Cadwaller's voice. "'Twas indiscreet to quarrel so loudly! But a little while and I shall arbitrate! Here!—a pistol!" Two or three others ran from the great hall to him. "'Tis to be regretted that I must so damage my own property," he called; "but I must rescue you, Mistress! Stand to one side of the door, my lady! I would not have you injured! Are you ready?"

I moved quickly to Toby's side and took a pistol. Mistress Heron stood against the wall, gazing thoughtfully across the room. Her face was pale again, her lips drawn firmly in, and her hands clenched at her sides.

"One!" shouted Cadwaller. "When I have counted three I shall fire!"

I stepped unsteadily to the table.

"One!—two!—three!" There was a moment's pause—then, crash! I heard a piece of the lock come ringing down the steps, and the distant scream of a female servant mingled with the explosion's vibrations.

I leaned over and blew out the candle.

"Oh!" Mistress Heron gasped.

"Yes!" I whispered.

"In the dark I cannot open the panel to the passage."

The door above crashed open. "Oh! Fetch me a light! 'Tis dark below stairs!" said his Lordship.

CHAPTER XVII.

We had delayed too long; the secret panel still was closed, and could not be opened in the darkness; the candle was out; but one door remained between our enemy and us; and beyond the panel I made sure I had heard a faint noise as of stealthy moving. Darkness is usually better for the pursued than for the pursuer, but that is when the pursued has an open way before him. Close the door to safety, and darkness will seal it. And place on the other side of the sealed door a concealed enemy—for what other would have cause for being there—and the pursued finds himself in a position for which he never has hoped. The part of the hunted was one in which I had had but little experience. I liked it not. But in this case it was the only course having wisdom on its side. Mistress Heron should not be exposed to a danger that could be avoided. And this very care that I had exercised to prevent our immediate discovery was the cause of our greatest danger. I had blown out the candle so that Cadwaller should not see the light shining through the key-hole, and so discover at once in which room we had taken refuge. The delay was a more serious matter than you that read these lines may on first thought think it. 'Twas

necessary to light the candle ere the secret panel could be opened; and if the candle should be lighted my Lord would see in which room we were. He would break in; we should escape into the passage; he then would know that such a passage existed, and from which room it led. You now the more readily may forgive me when I tell you that I swore roundly—under my breath—and cursed myself—silently—for being such a fool as to neglect to have the panel opened and ready for flight at the approach of the enemy.

Cadwaller evidently had no more love for the darkness than I; for I heard him call for two more pistols, and when the fellow returned with the light, he ordered him and some others to go before and "shoot down the knaves at first sight."

I now saw there was nothing left but to light the candle and make our exit—and mayhap meet our concealed friend in the secret passage. We now had thrown away a trick indeed, and there was no chance to be seen of making good the loss.

We could hear the men hesitate and dispute as to which should go first, for doubtless they thought it certain death for at least two, when they should come with a light into a dark place where two desperate men were driven to bay. I chuckled when I heard them; but Cadwaller seemed not to see the humour of the situation, for he burst into a storm of oaths and threats.

"Down with you, cowards! 'Slife! a pretty band I have about me! Do you fear this braggart more than me? Is his sword more to be feared than my displeasure? Down, I say, or two of you shall go to hell presently!"

"Oh, good my Lord, good my Lord! I'll go! I'll go!"

I heard Toby snort disdainfully. Then hesitating feet were heard upon the steps.

I groped about the table for the steel and flint, then paused as my Lord called out:

"'Slife! have you not found them yet? Hasten, or, by Heaven, I'll have you whipped to a pulp!" He still stood in the passage above. The noble Earl believed not in the spilling of noble blood—not when common red was at hand in plenty.

"There's no one here, my Lord!"

"What! No one there! Blind owls, I heard them! Search well behind everything! Look beneath the steps!"

A little startled exclamation came from one of the men, and then we could hear him poking something between the steps, and directing his comrade where to hold the candle.

"No, my Lord, they're not here. They must have escaped, for there are doors leading from the passage!"

"Oh, doors!—doors!—Ha! that is better." He quickly ran down the steps as he spoke. "Try that door."

The fellow shook it. "Locked, my Lord."

"The next."

I still was searching for the steel, flint and tinder, but it is remarkable how things can avoid your hands, even when you know their position, or within a foot or so of it.

"Locked, my Lord."

"All locked! Ha! they have large apartments. The next. And you, keep your eyes on the others. We want no surprise."

I found the steel, then the flint, but the tinder-box still avoided me.

"Locked, my Lord."

"The next. Ah! this is the last. They are behind one of these doors. We have them fast."

The fellow shook the door of our room. "Locked, my Lord. All locked, may it please your Lordship."

"What! May it please me! May it please the devil! Fool! go fetch some others."

During all this Mistress Heron was feeling softly along the wall for the panel; but when the fellow shook our door, she stopped. When he left at his master's urgent command, she whispered: "I cannot find it without the light."

By this time my temper, which never has been of the longest, blazed out. I should swear I had searched every square inch of that table, despite bottles, tubes, globes, and kettles, but no tinder-box

could I find, though before I had blown the candle out it lay in plain sight near the corner. So sure was I of its position that even in the dark I could picture it distinctly—when my anger blazed up. As her whisper came to me I saw it clearly. There it was, just beyond my nose. I angrily snatched at it. . . . Crash.

"Ha!—at last!" cried Cadwaller.

"Oh!" cried the lady.

Toby cleared his throat.

I caught a short word between my teeth just in time.

"One moment, and I shall release you from your harsh imprisonment. Is it not strange how the tables turn?"

"And the glasses, my Lord," I replied, kneeling and feeling among the scattered fragments for the tinder-box, which I had heard fall when the glass was overturned.

"You prefer to die laughing? 'Tis commendable."

"I have no mind to oblige you any manner, my Lord."

"But I am said to be persistent."

"And cautious. Have a strong dislike for dark places."

"Not for all dark places."

"No?"

"I am partial to dark eyes."

"And dark knobs upon the forehead?"

Toby chuckled, and came to strike the light.

"And red lips."

"Turned grey with chattering fear?"

"And a soft, white neck, well chiselled, as from marble made."

"And well choked by dying fingers?"

Mistress Heron and Toby eyed me in wonder, not understanding this last part of the duel of words.

To Toby I whispered: "When the panel opens draw the table along the floor with as much noise as possible." Then, taking the candle, I moved, tottering, to the wall. "Now, Madam," I whispered, "which panel?"

She counted seven along the wall, paused and placed her fingers upon the moulding.

"One moment," I warned in her ear. "Which way does it go?"

"From us."

"Upon hinges?"

"Yes."

"Swinging to the right or left?"

"To the left."

"Then please stand well to the left, so that you will not be before the opening."

She hesitated, looking at me in wonder, then faintly smiled. "And you?"

I raised my pistol, ready to fire, should there be cause.

Again she smiled. "A useless precaution; there is no one there."

"But we may take no chances."

She took a step to the left and pressed heavily upon the moulding.

"Now, Toby."

The table with its load of glasses rattled like a charge of cavalry. I held the candle as high as my wounded side would permit. The panel moved softly back, discovering a narrow passage, cold and black as a moonless midnight.

"Ho, ho! Preparing a barricade, eh! Becoming more serious, my friend! That is well! That is well! More in keeping with your circumstances, eh!"

"And assures my Lord that there will be no sally. You feel safer now, eh, my Lord!" Toby shouted, as I moved into the little passage.

"What, what, little rat? Hast learned croaking from your master? Has his wit failed, then, that you must take up the cudgels? Or mayhap he has fallen into another fainting-fit and hides behind my lady's petticoats! Which is it, little rat, little rat?" Surely my Lord was losing dignity. From the rage in his voice 'twas evident that Toby's shot had gone home.

I heard the men rush down the steps.

"Ha! now we shall draw this badger. Beware within, Mistress; I'm about to blow up the lock!

Tuck your cringing charge well behind you; he may be injured in the rush! Ready, Mistress, ready! Swing high his mighty sword! Gad! we'll have it reproduced before the King!" The despicable coward was taking a revenge worthy of a fishmonger. In his eagerness to mortify the lady and goad me to fury he forgot the presence of his men. Faugh! it gave one a qualm to be compelled to fight such a dog.

Nothing could I see down the dark passage, so I returned to the room to give his Lordship a last warning ere they should force the door. For I wished to gain all the time possible, as every minute that passed sent the sun lower, and darkness without would give us our only chance for leaving the grounds, should we succeed in leaving the house. But as I was re-entering the room, something told me to glance over my shoulder into the darkness. I did so—and should almost swear I saw, far, far in the black distance, a streak of dim light. For but a moment it lasted—then all behind me was thick blackness once more. Whether it was the fellow I had heard moving before the panel was opened or a band coming to cut off all chance of retreat, I could not decide. I was inclined to think it the former, but sufficient uncertainty to keep my wits sharp still was lurking in the cold, black passage.

"Again I shall count a warning!" shouted Cadwaller. "One!"

Toby looked at me, raised his pistol, pulled up his eyebrows and jerked his head toward the door. A strange grim smile was hovering on the lips of the little man.

"Two!"

I nodded. Toby sprang quickly to the door, applied the muzzle of his pistol to the keyhole and waited.

"Three!" exultingly rang out. But it was drowned instantly in a deafening crash, which in turn gave place to sounds of scampering feet and profanity colossal, mixed in such proportions as to make a music to my ears.

I put the candle upon the table, held my hand to my side, and laughed until a sharp stab in my wound made me cease. The cut was burning fiercely, which gave me a kind of stimulation. Mistress Heron looked from Toby to me in wonder—she had not realised what happened. Toby leaned against the wall and quietly reloaded the pistol, the odd smile still playing about the corners of his mouth. His act reminded me of the time when, about two weeks before, he blew through the keyhole into the eavesdropper's ears. Doubtless Cadwaller knew of that incident.

"Does that recall to your mind the night of the first of May, my Lord?" I questioned. "'Tis well you held your pistol, and not your ear, to the door, was it not, my Lord?"

"Force the door, cowards! Is this the way you

serve me?—run at a pistol-shot? Force the door! I have another pistol, and there shall be one coward the less if I raise it!"

"Contemplating suicide, my Lord?" I mocked.

"Abide, abide! Your tongue almost has done its wagging!"

Mistress Heron moved uneasily, and when I glanced at her, her eyes were fixed anxiously on me. She nodded toward the secret panel.

"One moment, Madam. I must gain time," I whispered. Then to Toby: "Ahead of Mistress Heron into the passage."

He hastened across the room, ramming a bullet into his pistol as he went.

The door-knob turned in timid hands, then a shoulder was hurled against the oak. The bolt was well fastened, and I knew heavy blows would be required to force it.

"One moment, my Lord!" I shouted.

"Ho! ho! So our spirits are drooping, Master Bravo, eh! Force the door! We have him! Ha! ha!"

Still the men hesitated.

"We are two determined men, my Lord——"

"But becoming somewhat frightened!"

"Bah! my Lord. I belong not to the nobility!"

"But soon will belong to the devil!"

"Mayhap. But not before my Lord Cadwaller. I shall give you precedence—your due by birth!"

"Force the door; I weary of his prattle!"

Again a weight was hurled against the door.

"Again I say, consider, my Lord."

"Nonsense!"

"We have four pistols, one of which is for your Lordship."

"Yes?"

"Provided, of course, you do not flee. Those four pistols mean four dead men."

"Your tongue revives your confidence, my man."

"We have our swords also."

"And a gash in our side. 'Twill soon be time to faint again—danger is at hand."

"Now, my Lord, take your choice. But so sure as you enter this room, so sure are you a dead dog—the King shall lose a spaniel."

"Oh! My thanks for the advice. I have more men at my disposal. I shall summon them." Then he gave an order to one of his men. I could not catch it, but he was sending for the rest of his band, for the fellow sprang up the stairs three steps at a time.

I smiled and turned to my lady. She still stood against the wall, her white hands hanging clasped before her, her face a little pale, lips compressed, and her splendid eyes turned to me in trouble. She returned my smile with a curl of her lip, and came toward me.

"The coward!" she said quite loud enough for my Lord to overhear.

"Courage, Mistress; I soon shall give you a rescue!"

"Oh! still without, my watch-dog? Still nursing your wounded paw?"

"Anon, anon! I well can afford to wait; my time is coming."

"You believe that every dog has his day?" I laughed.

He almost choked with rage as he hurled an oath back at me, then began pacing to and fro along the passage.

"But why do you prompt him to get more men?"

"That we may gain time. We must have darkness. And then, Sir Charles may yet arrive in time."

"Sir Charles! But surely you——!" She drew back a step.

The action stabbed me. I looked at her sadly.

"Oh, forgive me!" she whispered. "Whatever you do will be right. You can do no wrong."

"Oh, can I not! I am but little better than the worst, believe me; but when I start upon any road I pursue it to the end, be it for good or for evil. This time it has chanced to be for good, thank God, so trust me to the end."

"Oh, spare me!" She bowed her head, her face and neck flushing rosy. "You know I trust you.

'Twas the surprise you gave me by mentioning Sir Charles Rawley's name as though he could be relied upon for help." Her bosom rose and fell quickly, and when she raised her face again her eyes were swimming in tears—those tears that from the first had gone so to my heart. "Now what of Sir Charles?" She smiled sadly.

I cleared my throat. "If Sir Charles has the brains that I think he has, he will know of the hasty departure of Cadwaller's men from Dover. 'Tis in the interest of his villainous plans to prevent the Earl from overcoming me. 'Tis strange he is so slow to move, for these knaves have made two trips from Dover. I must take advantage of their opposing villainies by pitting them against each other. With the victor I then can settle more satisfactorily than at present. We must use every means that offers; and to profit by the quarrels of scoundrels is an honest man's fair duty."

"I—I can never—can never reward you for your noble self-sacrifice," she whispered brokenly. "See what my fate would be if any other had been given your place."

"Faith," I replied, trying to speak lightly, "you might have escaped this trouble completely, but for me. Your position could scarcely be worse than it now is, Madam."

She shook her head, then looked up quickly. "Do you—do you regret undertaking our apprehension?"

I looked at the floor, grasped the edge of the table tightly, and again the strange tingling ran through my veins. I thought of what she had said but a little while before, and as the picture of this great man that she loved came before my mind's eye my heart turned cold, but I answered honestly. "No, I never can regret it, Madam. It has been a great wild dream, but a dream of music—of—of sweet solos, duets—and thunderous choruses. Sad it has been, too, Madam,—but wild, wild, wild!" At the last my voice caught in my throat—I could say not another word. . . . I turned and snuffed the candle.

A stealthy step came down the stairs. My Lord abruptly stopped his raging stride.

"Who the devil are you?" he burst out. A little pause. "Eh? What's that?" he added in a lower tone. "Oh, it is you, my fine fellow! Stop bobbing! What do you——?" He broke off.

The stealthy steps came on agan. Another little pause—then whispering and indistinct muttering.

My heart sank deep as I listened. "So, so!" I worried. "As I thought! As I thought!"

The lady looked at me in surprise. "What is it?" she whispered.

"Our chances dwindle, Madam."

"Are they about to force the door?"

"I think not. I hope they will."

"But why—how do you know this? You cannot hear what they say."

"No, Madam; but I think our ears did not deceive us."

She raised her brows inquiringly.

I nodded toward the passage. "You heard the noise last night. I heard it when I held my ear to the panel. Someone was there; I saw him go out at the other end. . . . He is whispering now with my Lord Cadwaller."

"Oh!" She turned and glanced into the dark passage. "You think we are betrayed?—that they will cut off our escape?"

"Yes, Madam,"—I was thinking quickly—"unless you can get into the grounds before they have time to cut us off. To where does the passage lead?"

"It opens into a little cell in the old part of the house."

"Is the old part occupied?"

"No, nor has it been for years. The cell opens into a little hall, from which stairs lead to a room with a glass roof, where my father studied the stars."

I heard the men come rushing along the passage above-stairs. From the number of feet I deemed the band complete.

Still the murmuring on the other side of the door went on. It seemed that Cadwaller was questioning the other.

I formed a plan that might succeed if sufficient time still was left us.

"From the other end of the passage can you reach the shelter of the trees without discovery?"

"Yes; the door is on the far side from the house."

"Then haste—lose not a moment—quick—with Toby!" I snatched another candle and lighted it in the flame of the first. I handed it to her. "No sound until you are in the passage; then go as quickly as the light will permit."

She gathered up her skirts and tiptoed noiselessly past Toby and into the dark passage.

"Quick, Toby," I whispered; "follow Mistress Heron. Hasten to the coach. Leave the grounds quietly. Reach Canterbury in safety, or kill the horses in the attempt. I shall keep Cadwaller's men well occupied. Haste!" I seized his shoulder and pushed him into the passage.

"No, Sir," he growled. "You may shoot me, but I'll not." He held his body very erect, but his eyes were directed to my feet.

"This is true, fellow? Remember, a lie will cost your life!" came to us in Cadwaller's voice.

"What, Toby,—disobedience?"

"May it be my last offence, Sir, but I can't help it." There could be no mistaking his determination, for his shoulders rose and fell slowly with the deep breathing of a brave man's firm resolve.

"But do you know what your stubbornness will cost? In a few moments our escape will be cut off. That means our absolute failure."

"Let me stay, Sir. You cannot hold them; you're staggering and half-dead now, Sir."

"What is it?" Mistress Heron asked, turning back.

I heard some of the Earl's men start up the stairs.

"Alas, Madam, Toby has outlived his obedience! He refuses to go."

Cadwaller rapped against the door. "Ho! Master cut-throat, I have changed my mind. I shall not waste one of my men's lives in taking you. I have decided to starve you out, so shall now leave you while I sup."

"Go to the devil, friend Spaniel; I'm annoyed!"

He swore, then laughed, after which they all—seemingly—went up the little stairs.

"What! Toby disobedient! Impossible!" Her eyes were wide in wonder. "Come, Toby," she whispered gently.

"And leave my wounded master to be murdered? No, Madam, I wasn't made on that plan."

"What! Leave him! Who said he was to remain?" She looked quickly from Toby to me, then back to Toby, her dark eyes flashing brightly in the candlelight. "Oh, fie, Sir!" she flashed, again turning to me. "Because I am a woman, must I be a coward? Leave you to be murdered? Nay, Toby, you did well to refuse! If you remain, Sir, then I shall remain also!"

I groaned at this fatal delay. Even now the enemy might be at the other end.

"Lead on, Toby. There now is no cause for me to remain; Cadwaller has left the door. We shall find them at the other end, I fear."

"Hark!" the lady warned, as Toby passed her and was starting ahead almost at a run.

A stealthy, cat-like step was coming down the stairs. I hesitated. The cautious steps came slowly to the door. Another delay. I felt sure that by this time our retreat was cut off. The timid unknown stopped. . . . A plan flashed through my mind, whereby it was possible to throw Cadwaller into the wrong track, and cause him to relax his vigilance. That now seemed our only chance. The Mystery in the passage without hissed sharply through the shattered keyhole. I smiled and prepared to play my card.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"TOBY," I whispered, "take your cue from me. A great rage, with just a sprinkling of oaths and many threats of vengeance, will be quite in order. Watch me closely, and take me up promptly. Create as much disturbance as possible, but be sure to await my cue. Understand?"

"Yes, Sir." He looked a little puzzled, but his eyes twinkled with the love he always had for action.

"And, Madam, if you see me fall, will you please consider that sufficient provocation for the uttering of a scream?"

"Fall!" she gasped. "You must not fall! Your side! You will kill yourself!"

"Hist!" again came through the smoke-begrimed keyhole.

"Nay, nay, Madam, I shall not be injured." (There was an unnatural feeling in my head, which made me reckless). "And after you scream, act as you may think best. I have no doubt as to the result. Be ready to escape at a moment's notice."

"Hist!" once more.

"And you?" she persisted.

"I shall be ready also, Madam," I smiled reassuringly.

"Hist! hist! hist!" came more sharply.

"Who's there?" I growled angrily.

"Sh!"

"Oh! So you come to warn me! Am I right?"

"Sh! sh! sh!" more imperatively.

"One moment; I'm busy."

He seemed to be trying to whisper something through the keyhole. But I think he was not greatly disappointed because I could not catch his words.

I searched hastily through my pockets until I found the parchment warrant from the King for the arrest of poor Sir Alfred. Then, moving to the other side of the door—that is, to the side having the keyhole—I rolled the document into the form of a horn.

"Hist! hist!" he blew once more.

I stooped quickly and peeped for but an instant into the hole. I could see nothing—the passage without was in darkness. This I took as a good warning. Crossing to the table I blew out the candle there, then stepped to where the lady and Toby stood and directed the latter to hold his hat between the light and me until he should hear any disturbance, when he was to rush to me at once.

Mistress Heron still looked puzzled and anxious, but Toby, to whom this experience was far from new, smiled and made ready to obey.

"Hist! hist! hist!" impatiently.

"Yes, yes; I'm coming!"

"Sh!"

Again I crossed to the lock side of the door. From here I nodded to Toby, who at once shut off the light.

"Now," I said, speaking very low through the horn, "what is it?"

He whispered something too indistinctly for me to catch;—but doubtless this was not accidental.

"Louder!" I called, still speaking through my trumpet, and keeping my head well past the side of the door.

"Put your ear closer, or I shall be overheard. The guards are in the passage above. Hasten! I may be discovered."

"I don't think they would injure you if they should discover you," I muttered to myself.

"What?"

"Nothing. I merely cursed the sentries."

"Oh! Now, can you hear?"

"Yes."

"Hold your ear very close; I dare not speak above a whisper."

"Yes, I understand. Go on."

"You must escape at once through the secret passage. Lord Cadwaller does not intend to starve you out, as he said. Soon he will force the door when you least expect it. You must not lose a moment. Can you hear me?"

I changed the horn from ear to mouth. "Yes. But who are you? I cannot recall your voice."

He muttered something that I could not make out.

"What?" I questioned. I fully expected what followed; for 'tis difficult to lime an old bird that has been caught before.

"Sh! Hold your ear closer. I dare not speak louder."

"Very well. Now I can catch everything. What name?"

Crash! The parchment was snatched from my hand as though struck by lightning; a flash of flame leaped past my face; the powder burned pungent in my nose; a crash of glass came from the table, where the bullet had wrought havoc; Mistress Heron screamed beyond my expectations; Toby rolled out a volley of epithets; and I sat down quickly, raised my leg, then let it fall to the floor with as great a noise as possible.

"Oh, the villains! Oh, the knaves! They have killed him! They have killed him!" Toby stormed with surprising naturalness.

"Oh! oh! oh!" the lady lamented. "The cowards! The cowards!" she denounced.

"Haste! haste!—the lights!" Cadwaller shouted. "We have them now! There's only that little devil left! Ha! ha! my lady, all's fair in love or war!"

I took advantage of the uproar progressing on both sides to rise painfully, with Toby's assistance, to my feet. My side burned and throbbed even more cruelly, and my head felt strangely light.

Down the stairs plunged the men in a body, while

his Lordship laughed excitedly and urged them to force the door.

"Don't use your pistols!" he shouted above the sounds of the blows against the door. "Use your swords. The lady must not be injured! Cut down the little devil whether he resists or not; he is too wise! Force it! Force it! Not so many! You are in each other's way! Now, force it!"

"Come on!" shouted Toby; "I shall account for a half dozen of you—ay, more! Come, ravens, ravens, come; but you will need eagles' claws, my ravens!" The little man now stood with candle in one hand and pistol in the other. "Do you want them all here, Sir?" he whispered.

"Yes, yes. Make as much noise as possible; we must attract them that guard the other end."

The fastening of the bolt was straining under the weight of bodies being hurled against it.

"I'll scatter them," Toby growled.

"There; a little more together; you are wasting your strength! All hurl yourselves at the same moment! A few more united blows will finish it!" My Lord was giving good advice.

I stood beside Mistress Heron by the open panel, ready to make our exit when the proper time should come. Toby moved quickly to the door and looked carefully to his pistol, his fierce little face showing set but mischievous in the light of the candle in his hand.

Crash! again came against the door, as the men followed their master's directions. Zounds! two more blows like that and the bolt would burst.

"Well done!" Cadwaller approved. "Three more such blows and we shall be in!"

Toby, with his pistol to the keyhole, paused, awaiting his opportunity. . . . It came. He fired—and the sound of the explosion was mingled with cries of consternation, oaths, a groan, and scampering of feet.

"Ha! ha!" the little man laughed, thrusting the empty weapon into his belt and drawing forth its mate. "So my Lord is forgetful! I thought I taught your Lordship to avoid keyholes a little time since!"

"Ha! ha! Yes, damn you, little rat, and I taught your master the same lesson more effectively! Ha! ha!" he mocked.

"Yes, murderer!" Toby shouted, seemingly choked with rage; "and I will teach you a many lessons ere you take me!"

"Come, force the door, cowards! Have you not faced a pistol before now? Must ye run at every sound, cowards?"

"They have acquired the habit from association," Toby put.

"Abide, abide, little rat! I shall clip that sharp tongue short in a moment! Now—together!"

Crash! The door bulged and groaned under the

heavy strain, the bolt bent and the staple drew farther from the frame. Had it not been that Toby's bullet had made the men fearful of the fatal keyhole I doubt if the bolt could have withstood that blow. As it was, the enemy clustered to the other side—to the side on which the hinges were—which greatly diminished the strain upon the bolt.

"Ha! ha! say your prayers, little rat! One more blow will force it!"

"I have three pistols still, my Lord. With each of these pistols I shall kill one of your men, mayhap your Lordship."

"Now!"

But Toby was as quick as they. He pressed the muzzle of his pistol against the panel upon which the greatest weight seemed to fall—and fired. Again there was a scattering and curses. But with these came another sound, which gave me more satisfaction: it was the heavy fall of a body to the floor. Toby's bullet had found its billet—his Lordship had lost a good man.

"Do you approve of my marksmanship, my Lord?" Toby laughed. "Of course I'm shooting under great difficulties. You see, a door is a thing difficult to aim through. Now a keyhole has its advantages—that is, when your target's ear is directly opposite—eh, my Lord?"

"Move him aside, and call another to take his place! Haste! Damnation! do you let one little

devil that would not make a half of any one of you beat you off, when nothing but a shattered door stands between you?"

"Ha! ha!" Toby laughed derisively, as the wounded—or dead—man was removed. "Keep well to one side, my Lord; I have two pistols left."

One of the men dashed up the stairs, and a moment later I heard him shouting to one of his companions to come to him.

Cadwaller made no reply to Toby's mocking. Behind his dignity he now took refuge, for behind it he could keep from admitting that Toby so far was having the best of the fight.

I tiptoed softly to the table, and, taking up the stool, returned to my position beside the panel. Then I thought of the parchment that I had used as a trumpet, and took a glance over the floor for it; but it was not to be seen, so I gave it no more heed. 'Twas of no consequence—save as a remembrance.

In the breathing-space that Cadwaller permitted, Toby returned to the table and furiously reloaded his pistols. His eyes twinkled like little stars beneath two ragged clouds. The little man was in his element—Cadwaller was furnishing him with a rare delight. When the odds were two to one Toby's spirits were at their highest. True, he frowned even more than was his custom, but that was for the fear he had for Mistress Heron's plight. His joy was

mixed with a keen anxiety, which made him ten times more formidable.

The lady watched him with an undisguised fascination. The strain upon her must have been terrible—for even I (than who there is no older hand at this kind of business) felt my muscles twitch and tremble from the high tension of the seemingly unending situation of uncertainty—, but still her eyes twinkled mischievously as she watched the little tiger taking advantage of every moment, word, or movement.

The fellow that his Lordship had sent for assistance now rushed down the steps again, followed by either one or two others. Our time was at an end. By a bold front, a few shots and a little strategy, we had gained more than I had hoped; but still I doubted if it was sufficiently dark without to cover our flight through the trees to the coach—in case those guarding the other end of the passage had been withdrawn. And then there came to me the thought that perhaps our men that guarded the carriage had been captured, and that we should not find the coach in waiting. Well, our position could be no worse than it was, and meeting difficulties before they came to me was a needless search for things with which I already was abundantly supplied. As the fellows reached the foot of the little stairs I dismissed all such thoughts from my mind, crossed cautiously to Toby and somewhat disappointed the little man by

directing him to take the candle and precede Mistress Heron along the secret passage. I had a plan whereby Cadwaller's pursuit might be slightly delayed after we should have left the room. 'Twould be of assistance only if he should know which was the secret panel. But I doubted not that the traitor had told him all.

"Now," Cadwaller growled, "you have but one man opposed to you, and if you don't force that door, despite his pistols, I shall have every man of you lashed into a jelly!"

I quickly stepped after Mistress Heron—taking the stool with me—and paused for a moment to look back. Toby ahead had the candle, so the room was in darkness—nothing could be seen save a faint glimmering of light through the holes in the door. I softly closed the panel and placed the stool against it, so that it could open but a few inches, for the stool would then be jammed between the panel and one of the stone walls of the passage.

"Now, all together! Make one blow do it!" my Lord directed.

Crash!—and instantly another crash. The door was open. It had been forced from its hinges. The second crash was its fall to the floor.

I waited for no more, but hastened after my companions as quickly as my stiff hip and stabbing side would permit. Coming faintly to me as I tottered

on were the sounds of rushing heavy feet, calls for light, cries of disappointment, and colossal oaths. I smiled as I pictured the look Cadwaller wore when he discovered not my dead and bloody body.

CHAPTER XIX.

The exertion was beginning to tell against my strength. Several times, as I hastened through the chilly passage, my legs wabbled treacherously, and once or twice I bumped against the wall. My breath came with an effort, and a sickening feeling of weakness stole slowly through my body, gnawing at my heart, eating my resolution. A great part of my blood had been lost the night before, and as yet I had not had sufficient time to renew the supply. Nature may be strained and stretched to a great extent, but she will not be abused beyond a certain point. I now felt that I was rapidly drawing near that point. Nothing but an iron will and hasty action could carry me through. But through I would go; to fail now would be too terrible. If fighting were to be done, it would be done within the next few minutes; after that, the work would fall to Toby alone. And the King! Yes, I should see the King. Ah! and Sir Charles was still to be considered. Could I hold out? I began to doubt it. Yes, I would hold out! Doubt could not be entertained nor encouraged. Where was Sir Charles? I could not tell. He had said that if Cadwaller could be detained his overthrow was certain. Well, he had

been detained. But had his detention been sufficiently long? I hoped so, but doubted. And then, Sir Charles had warned me that he might be considered my enemy after the Earl should be undone. Ha! I must overcome him, too! A pleasant prospect, when his Lordship had not yet been repulsed. But the King! the King! Ah! how could I meet my greatest opponent? If I could but escape and see him I had a plan whereby strategy might win. But could I hold out? Would my strength fail me? A mountain of forbidding obstacles rose before me. Could I sweep them aside with a failing hand? My heart sank. "My God, I must!" I groaned through tight-clenched teeth. "I must! I must! I must!" My heart beat like a heavy hammer; my breath came like sobbing; I trembled weakly, but hastened on, borne down by the weight of my sword and pistols.

"Are you there? May I help you?" The lady turned to reach out a helping hand.

"No, no! After Toby!—Quick, for God's sake!—They're forcing the panel!—Julius has pointed it out!"

"Your strength fails you! Let me take your hand,—please!"

"No, you must show Toby how to get out! One moment may ruin all!"

She fluttered away after the flickering candle, but turned, as she drew near the little man, and looked back.

"Noble, noble lady!" I whispered. "Ah! and she loves, she loves! But why is he not here, sharing her danger? My God, if I fail, he shall have my dying curse!" I ground my teeth and stumbled onward, my hand held to my wound to relieve it of the jolting.

Would that dark cold passage never end? It seemed that I had traveled miles, and still the candle flickered far ahead, where Toby's hat cut through the air before it. Of a sudden the cold atmosphere seemed to strike my heart. A chill ran through me. It jerked back my head, shook it from side to side, then hurled me forward gasping.

Far in the rear a loud crashing of oak sounded through the darkness. By this time, doubtless, Cadwaller's men were rushing to cut us off. There could be but one or two at most guarding the panel to which we were fleeing, but the others would hasten to the gates if they had not discovered the coach. In the latter case, they would rush to the assistance of them that waited us. His Lordship's rage at being baffled had blinded him to the uselessness of following us through the passage, but surely it would not cause him to overlook the necessity of cutting us off ahead! "Perhaps it will!" I thought, and, stimulated by the new hope, dashed on, keeping to the right to save my wounded side those savage blows when I lurched against the wall.

Ah! the candle stopped. Mistress Heron sprang

to Toby's side, her hands above her head—she was opening the secret panel. She glanced back over her shoulder and paused.

"Go on!—Go on!—I come!—I come!" I shouted hoarsely, and pressed forward.

Still she waited; she would not move until sure that I should go with them—noble soul!

"Toby, take his arm," she commanded, as I came labouring up. "Oh, this will kill you, I know! Your face is drawn with agony!"

I leaned against the wall, waved Toby aside, and pointed to the panel.

"Quick!—the coach!—Toby, not another halt!—Madam, haste!"

Still she paused, watching me with troubled, beauteous eyes.

"For God's sake!" I cried.

"Guard him well, Toby. I look to you for his safety." Zooks! one would think I was the charge that Cadwaller had called me.

"One moment is worth everything!" I groaned. "Toby, I keep a pistol for you—if you look back! Haste!" I whispered in his ear. "Carry her, if she will go no other way!"

Toby's face was inscrutable. Not a feature changed, but his eyes were more gentle than was usual.

"Remember," I whispered again, "if you stop I shall kill you, though you are my best friend."

He said nothing—merely touched his hat, drew forth his sword and stepped from the passage the moment Mistress Heron opened the panel.

The cell into which we followed the little man was very small, without a window—mayhap a dungeon in the old, old days. Opposite the secret passage was a short flight of stone steps (the whole room was in stone) leading to a battered and heavily studded door.

As I closed the panel a faint sound came crawling through the darkness behind me. My Lord was thundering still at the other end.

Toby sprang up the steps.

"Toby," the lady whispered, "before leaving the next room, put out the light."

"Ay, Madam."

The door was not fastened. Toby swept on. Mistress Heron stopped at the foot of the steps and seized my arm.

"Oh!" I protested, "you put me to shame, Madam."

"Then you shall bear me company. I shame to be the cause of your suffering. Another man would be dead of such wounds and torture."

"Oh, I am strong—quite strong!"

"And not a murmur!" Her voice caught a little. "Ah! why could not the King be such a man?"

I looked at her in surprise, scarce believing my

ears. True, the night before she had called me a hero, quite without reason, but then her excitement was a sufficient excuse for the extravagance; now the same explanation did not come to me. My ears throbbed and my heart stood still, but Toby's candle cast too uncertain a light for me to read her face. Then I remembered her love for another. I smiled sadly and wondered if I, at my best, reminded her of him. "Ah, that must be it!" I groaned within me, and, clutching a pistol, followed Toby into the old stone hall.

Directly opposite the door through which we entered was the stairs that lead to Sir Alfred's room of glass above, and to our left the door to the outside—where the struggle would take place, I feared.

Toby advanced quickly, but with caution, stepping upon his toes, his head thrust forward, his sword raised to his waist and clutched with a vigour that meant—*Beware.*

He obeyed my directions not to look back, and moved steadily forward, thrusting his head farther out at every step. Mistress Heron still held my arm in kind assistance, despite my admonitions to keep by Toby. We were at the little man's heels when he paused at the door, put the candle upon the floor, and, quickly seizing the knob, tried it.

"Not locked," he whispered.

The lady stooped and blew out the light. Toby swung the door open, and sprang forth. Thank

Heaven, 'twas almost dark without! The western sky was a deep, dull red; thick and heavy clouds were rolling swiftly to the west, and adding to the gloom with every moment. Not a sound greeted the little man's exit—not a sound. I stood aside and forced my gentle helper to pass out, while I closed the door. Still not a sound. Toby seized the lady's arm and started almost at a run toward the deep shadows of the trees. She protested, struggled, and even struck at him, looking over her shoulder at me—in vain. He was inexorable. No halt would he make nor backward glance. He knew my mind, and knew that I meant what I had said. I hastened after as fast as my tottering legs would bear me. In the shadow of the first tree I glanced back, gasping and glad for the pause.

Zounds! there it was—the thing that I most dreaded. A black shadowy form slunk from a corner near the door and glided noiselessly, swiftly toward the ving in which we had left Cadwaller. For but a moment I saw it,—then the darkness closed in more thickly and swallowed it up.

A shiver ran down my back; my little remaining strength seemed suddenly to leave me, and I was forced to seize the tree to keep from falling.

A little cry came to me, then the sounds of a struggle—and I heard Mistress Heron's voice.

"Do as I bid you, or I shall call them to us!" she threatened.

"And then they would kill him at once," Toby growled. "Come, Madam; I must use force if necessary. I'm only obeying orders. He'd rather die than fail, Madam."

Another little struggle.

My blood sprang through my veins with a new life. Her fear for me was like to ruin all. I ground my teeth, clenched my pistol, pressed my hand to my side, and forced myself along.

"Oh, Toby, Toby! how can you do it?" Her voice was choked with sobs, and carried a reproach that cut the heart in twain. "And—and he loves—he loves you, Toby! He told—told me so! Oh, I cannot, I will not leave him to be murdered! Toby! Coward! Devil! Let me save him! My God! I must save him!" Her voice rose to a scream of frenzy. "I must! I must! I will! I will save him! I'll kill you! Fiend! Fiend!"

Her struggles had delayed them so I was now but a few paces behind.

"Oh! oh! oh!" I heard her weep. Then her voice sank to a sobbing moan, as the remorseless little man slowly carried her along.

'Twas growing very dark beneath the trees, and overhead the wind began to rustle through the leaves —a warning that the rain was near at hand.

"On, on, Toby!" I gasped.

"Let me walk," the lady commanded. "I will go. Help your master."

"No! I shall follow! The coach!—Haste!—Have the—men ready!"

Toby uttered no sound. He let his fair burden down and, seizing her hand, dashed forward once more, dragging her along.

On, on, on we went, the shadows growing deeper with every step, and the wind puffing up cooler and stronger after each lull. Would the sight of the coach ever cheer me? Would that straining flight, that age of torture, never cease? My head rolled backward and forward, and from side to side, with every laboured step; my breath came in great, painful sobs, straining through my closing throat; my feet clung to the earth when I lifted them and crashed against it when I put them down. Great God! the jolting was an agony that wrenched my heart and dropped my jaw. A glass of wine, and I could have been a man—ay, even a moment's rest would have revived me much. But the long wait in the cellar, the flight through the chilling passage, and this never-ending stumbling through the trees were trials too great, too great! On, on, on, ever onward! Had we missed the coach in the growing darkness? Had its hiding-place been revealed to Cadwaller? Surely either one or the other of these calamities had happened! . . . Still Toby pressed onward, dragging the kindest heart in the whole broad world behind him. My sobbing gasps for breath roared in my ears until I thought our foes would hear, and

thus we should be betrayed. . . . Still Toby wound his way through the trees.

"He surely must know where the coach should be!" I thought. "We have not reached the place. Can we reach the place?" I moaned.

"No, no, you cannot, Mark Everard!" something bellowed in my ear.

"Ha! ha! I cannot, eh!" came whistling through my teeth.

Then I bumped against a tree, my forehead striking the rough bark with a cutting force. I sank to my knee, then slipped lower, lurched to one side, and lay gasping.

A cry came to me. "I will not go! He has fallen! Is this your love for him?" More followed indistinctly. Then came a scream, but it was partly drowned in a rumble of thunder and the rustling of the leaves.

I felt the warm moisture trickle across my forehead. It revived me. My side stabbed and burned shrewdly. It angered me. That voice, that scream, thrilled through my veins and burned my heart like fire. That called me on. That voice, that sobbing little cry of pain, commanded my presence where it was. Ah, that was a power from which naught but the hand of death could hold back! Where that voice called I would go on until my worthless life all should be done.

"On, on, Mark Everard, unworthy braggart!

What! do you falter now? Would you turn poltroon at last;—become the thing you always have despised;—lose your last virtue, and prove your father's curse well justified? No, no!—follow her until your last breath leaves!" I raged and struggled on.

The lightning flashed brightly now, and the thunder rolled nearer; the trees bent and lashed under the strain of the wind, then stood still for a moment, while the Storm God held his breath, only to toss more vigorously at the next blast. . . . A rough night seemed certain.

The blood from the cut in my forehead, where I had bumped it against the tree, trickled into my eyes and half blinded me. I cursed, wiped it away, and drew my hat more over my brows, that I might appear less shocking. My whole side was on fire now, and since my fall my head throbbed the more, and my breath came still as painfully. But my determination was greater, and I hurled myself onward with a reckless fury.

Ever deeper grew the darkness, ever nearer rolled the storm, and ever farther Toby wound his way through the great black bodies of the trees. Time after time I lost sight of my leaders as I staggered, grim and bloody, along the dark and hopeless trail; but time after time I grasped my pistol tighter when a flash of lightning burned blue beyond them, showing a white face turned back in dumb encourage-

ment. I fancied I could see those soft dark eyes come back to me, tender and sweetly tearful, after each bright flash. Before my face they floated, burning into my soul, filling me with a new hope and reviving my sorry strength. "Come, come," they pleaded, "come on yet a little, and you shall have your rest. Come; you will save me if you fail not now. The way is weary, but it is for me if you fail cannot fail; I have called you 'hero.' On, on, on, but a little more. You are nobler now than you were last night. On, on, on; you cannot fail; it is for me. On, on, my hero; 'tis my voice that calls."

"I come, I come!" I sobbed aloud, then wiped my eyes again and dashed forward.

Flash, flash, flash, came the light in quick succession. . . . The coach stood huge, black and strong beneath a great old tree. Men and horses were bustling about; the door was open, and Toby was lifting his precious charge within. Ere the last light died I saw her turn and wildly point back through the trees. Her voice was killed in the roll of thunder.

"Thank God for the darkness and the storm!" I wheezed, and zigzagged slowly on.

Again the lightning, sharp-toothed and long, shot down the night before me. Blue fiery balls burned deep into my eyes. The thunder ripped the clouds apart and shook the rocking earth. The trees bent down, shrieking and trembling, clinging to the ground. I saw no coach nor soldiers now—saw noth-

ing but the balls of fire, heard nothing but the screeching of the trees. My own gasps for breath were whisked away and lost to my throbbing ears. . . . Once more the lightning flashed. Still I could see no coach. The trees stood great and black around me. No lovely face looked back and coaxed me on.

"Gone," I whispered to the raging blast—"gone. She has gone forever, Mark Everard, poor fool, poor fool, poor fool!"

"Ha! ha!" the wind laughed in my teeth. "Yes, gone to where Cadwaller waits with folded arms! Ha! ha! Mark Everard, you are done at last!"

"Who's that? It is a lie!" I shouted back, and raised my pistol.

"Ha! ha! your hour is come; and in your last moment 'tis Defeat that cheers!"

I braced my back against a tree. "Ah! old Defeat and Death! I've faced you many times, but never yet have felt your touch. Come, come, my friends, there'll be no compromise. Come on; you've—eaten up—my breath!"

The lightning still blazed before my eyes, shooting balls of fire and blackness alternately across my field of vision. But through all this confusion I could see two dark forms coming on. When I raised my pistol they hastily drew back and separated, then disappeared.

"Ha! ha!" I laughed, "you fear me still! Ah,

a losing game I play,—therefore the nobler! Come on; but little of me now is left; I would play my last card well!"

No sight there was of them. Even the lightning's flash showed naught but lashing trees and rich green sward. I stepped from the tree, my knees bending treacherously as I staggered out. The wind whisked the hat from my head, and my hair, freed, irritatingly lashed my eyes. Poor bruised and haggard outcast, I stood persecuted by Nature's every force; mocked by the laughing, whistling wind, blinked by the burning, crackling light, deafened by the roaring, shaking thunder, while fat Defeat and heavy Death lurked greedily behind the trees. . . . But she, I prayed, was safe.

"You fear me still!" I laughed again. "Come, come,—make haste before—I fall!—you'll have more glory so!"

Flash, flash, flash, the blinding light came ever again, and the thunder shook the earth. I staggered back, my palm pressed to my eyes. . . . A hand seized my wrist, an arm wound around my waist, then another seized my legs.

"Ah! And trapped by cowards—in the end! My failures are—complete!"

I would not please them with a struggle—they would laugh at my weakness, I feared. I sank into their arms, and lay gasping, as the first large drops beat through the leaves.

A hat was stuck upon my head. "Now," said a heavy voice, and I was lifted from the ground.

"A curse upon her skulking lover!" I shouted as the thunder crashed. . . . Then I sank into peaceful blackness.

CHAPTER XX.

THE rain was falling in heavy sheets upon something that gave it a hollow sound. . . . The lightning flashed in but one place, forming a square of light in a frame of black. . . . The thunder still rolled, but less heavily—the rain was drowning its voice. . . . I began to develop the feeling that I was moving; and I soon made out a rumble, as of wheels. Something was across my forehead—something soft, as a cloth. A jolt shook me up a little, and I knew for a surety that I was in a coach. I raised my hand quickly to my head—and started with the discovery that my fingers still grasped a pistol.

"Thank God!"

'Twas her voice, I should swear!

"Ah! have we passed the gates?" I cried, quickly sitting up and gasping in a deep breath of the cool wet air.

"Hush! No; we have just started toward them." Her voice was broken, and shook painfully. But, then, what other woman would have had her consciousness even?

"And did Toby wait for me?" I demanded an-

grily. (The lightning flashed brightly, and I saw the little man on the other seat.) "Have my orders weight no more?"

"No, no—hush! Toby is not to blame. I—I forced him to wait."

"Forced him, Madam!"

"Yes, yes; but let it pass."

"Yes, let it pass, but we, I fear, may not."

"Not what?"

"Not pass the gates. Toby is easily forced of late."

My heart was bitter, for all my pains were like to be in vain.

"No. Do not blame him. I—I held a—pistol to his head. He—he could not help it."

"You—you held a pistol to his head?"

"Yes. He forced me into the coach; and you turned and staggered off in the wrong direction. Had you been killed I should have felt your blood upon my head! I—I could not hear to see such murder!—I snatched a pistol from Toby's belt!—I could not help it!—I would do it again!"

"Ah!" I said quietly. My heart would let me say no more.

"Now you are with us; and if we fail, we all shall fail together!" Her voice still shook, but not from fear, I know.

I sat still, taking deep and rapid breaths of the strength-reviving air. Toby said no word, but now

and again, when the lightning blazed, I saw him staring out—his hat drawn fiercely forward, and a pistol in his hand. My anger melted as I thought of the sacrifice the noble little man had made that he might obey my last command. He had forced on to the coach, and would not have lost a minute, even though I should have been left behind. Ah, you that know not Toby's love for me cannot imagine what that meant to him! It tore his heart, I warrant; and I wonder not that he so calmly submitted when the lady put the pistol to his head. And she! —Dear, noble soul! In the darkness I stealthily drew my handkerchief and wiped my eyes. . . . I was very weak.

The coach proceeded slowly—the horses walked. We were on a level road now. The jolt that had roused me to reality was when we left the turf and trees behind. The storm was rolling over; the rain was falling less heavily with every passing moment. I peered forth and saw that clouds in black and ragged mats were scudding hastily across the sky, and in one spot taking on faint silvery edges. The splashing of the horses' feet came to me clearly as the rain lessened, and the grinding of the wheels upon the gravel sounded alarmingly loud.

"Which gate?" I asked.

"The front, Sir." Toby's voice was low and hollow.

I reached forward and put my hand upon his

shoulder. "Forgive me, old friend," I said sincerely. "Faith, my temper has not improved, I fear."

He cleared his throat very gruffly. "Storm's passing, Sir," came out of the darkness.

"Yes, Toby, in more senses than one."

"Now, that is better, much better," said the lady. "Our forces again are united. You both are too brave to quarrel between yourselves."

Toby coughed uneasily.

"Why the front gate?" I asked presently, to break the stillness.

"I thought they would expect us to leave by the other, Sir."

I considered a moment. "Yes, and the rear gate may be locked. They can only bar the front one since the lock is shattered. Hark! What is that?"

"Our men crossing the little bridge, Sir."

"Ah! There'll be a fight at the gate, Toby. Are your pistols dry?"

"Yes, Sir. Yours may be wet, Sir. Will you take one of mine?"

"No, Toby; my hand is something unsteady to-night. I'll trust to the stout old blade."

I felt an arm tremble against my side.

"Are you—are you determined?" Her voice came in an almost whisper.

I laughed forcedly a little. "Nay, Madam, I'll say resigned."

I felt her shudder.

In another moment we were crossing the little rustic bridge. We went very slowly and carefully, for the coach completely filled the passage. Indeed careful management on the part of the driver was required to guide us along the path even; for it was but a walk, too narrow by far for a coach.

"The dear old bridge," she murmured.

"How long, how long ago," I sighed, not knowing that I spoke aloud.

"Yes. And yet but a fortnight. Will it ever again be peaceful? Do the fishes still haunt this dear spot, or have they left in fear? Oh, the change since yesterday!" Again she shuddered and pressed back into the cushions.

"There is where I stood and thought aloud," I whispered.

"And here you gave your sword in my defence."

"In which it has been of but little servcie."

"Oh, you are unjust! Is it no service to save me then?"

"But I have not."

"You will." She spoke with a confidence not warranted by the circumstances. Her faith in me was strangely great.

Again I swore I would not fail.

'Twas very dark now, for the lightning was far to the west, where the thunder still rolled as a distant growl of wrath. The rain still drizzled a little,

but the moon was struggling determinedly to penetrate the clouds. The bushes at the sides of the path scraped and snapped aloud as the great wheels ground them down. The strain upon our spirits grew great. Slowly we were drawing near the place where our fate would be decided. Either we should pass forth secretly and unharmed or a fight awaited us, the result of which was only too certain. The darkness was full of dread, but in it lay our greatest hopes. If we could reach the gates ere the moon would break forth we might break through the enemy in the darkness. But the crackling of the bushes was as a messenger sent before. 'Twas scarcely possible that we should have the good fortune to get very near without attracting attention; for I was forced to expect to find Cadwaller and his men awaiting. What Toby had said might be true; my Lord might expect us to attempt to leave by the other gate. But it was not likely that the main entrance would be left unguarded. The blackness gradually took on a grayish look—the moon was winning its contest. I clenched my teeth the tighter and leaned forward to listen. We must have been very near the gates by this. Would the clouds hold out until we should have passed?

A chill ran up my back and shook my head.

"What is it?" Her voice was low but anxious.

"Nothing, Madam. I but trembled with excitement."

"Not a chill?"

"No, Madam." I lied to allay her alarm. A burning disk, with the gash over my ribs for a centre, was growing quickly. It now covered my whole side and arm, and was rushing swiftly to my head. I felt my strength returning as it ran through my veins.

The coach came to a stop.

"We're near the gate. Shall we make a dash for it?" The voice came from without. One of our mounted men was leaning from his saddle and speaking through the window.

"Have we reached the main drive?"

The fellow started—I heard him catch his breath. Doubtless my voice, still full of life, surprised him.

"Yes—yes, Sir. We are now at the end of the narrow path, Sir."

"Then strike the first blow. Tell the driver to keep close behind you."

He moved on. In another moment we were following.

"At the end of the narrow path," I thought. "We now enter the broad road—which leads to destruction."

Another chill ran through me. I held my breath, clenched my fists, and overcame the shaking.

We turned into the main drive. The moon broke through her cloudy wrappings. A pistol-shot snapped sharply near the gates. Then loud cheering

and shouted orders drowned all other sounds. We were discovered. The fight was almost on.

With hands of fire I undid the fastenings of the door.

"Now, Toby."

"Be careful, Sir." And he followed my example on the other side.

The lady put her hand upon my arm. "Wait. Not until you must," she pleaded. "It may not be necessary."

The moon was at its full, and now, having broken clear, flooded the earth almost to the brightness of the day. The drops depending from the leaves glistened like polished jewels. I cursed the sudden flood of beauty, and thrust forth my head to see what force opposed.

Three I saw clearly, all mounted, at my side.

"How many there, Toby?"

"Two, Sir—only two!"

The gates were closed and barred.

With a cheer our two men dashed ahead, attacking the five awaiting. Their swords flashed in the moonlight; for their pistols all were wet. In an instant the little forces met. The blades crashed in the first encounter; a pistol cracked, but no one fell. From where we waited nothing could be seen distinctly. A rush of men and horses, winding in and out, to the accompaniment of clicking, whistling steel, was all we could make out. Two men—one

was the wounded Denton—matched against five. What the result would be was only too plain.

I had thought to see some of the knaves come to attack the coach, but they chose a wiser plan. United they would overcome the two, then still united overwhelm us. 'Twas a clever plan—good generalship—but I hoped to spoil it.

I swung the door open and leaned out.

"Drive on!" I shouted. "Divide them! Force your horses through! Haste, or they'll have your comrades overcome!"

"Ay, Sir!" He lashed the horses and they sprang forward and into the mass of struggling men and beasts.

This sudden move caused consternation. For a moment the struggle stopped. Then I heard Cadwaller's voice.

"Strike, and strike quickly! Watch the coach!"

They were at it again ere one might draw a breath.

Toby sprang from his door and slammed it shut behind him. I followed his lead, and rushed to meet the first approaching horseman. . . . 'Twas the Earl of Cadwaller, himself.

"Well met, sly fox!" he snarled. "I'll see if you're proof to the blade as to the bullet!"

He spurred his mount and dashed forward, as though to ride me down. I stepped to one side and guarded, then pointed furiously beneath his arm. Ill luck! I missed him by an inch. He wheeled

his horse within its length to cut me from the coach. I saw his plan and sprang to the door before him,—then struck as he went past. He swore, but caught it manfully, and wheeled about again.

Toby's loud cheer came from the other side. His pistol cracked. "One down!" he shouted. "My Lord should guard the gate!"

The burning fever drove me mad, but lent me a giant's strength. I clutched the door, and then stood waiting his Lordship's rush.

"Ha!" cried the man from the driver's seat, and a bright flash cut through the moonlight. I looked again—and saw my Lord's great horse, with head flung high, rush backward under the spreading branches of a tree.

"Well done!" I cried. "But keep your horses well in hand, my man!" (The ready fellow had struck Cadwaller's mount across the nose with the flat of his heavy sword).

"I'll crop your ears for that, you knave! Know you not that you are helping the King's enemies to escape? Lift not your blade again! In the King's name I command it! You wear the uniform—beware!" The Earl's loud voice shook with a fiery rage, as he struggled to control his horse made mad with pain.

"Keep back! Keep back!" the lady pleaded in my ear. "Do not fight unless you must! Remember your wound!"

"Ah, but I cannot die! My strength is coming back! My weight seems naught! I walk upon the moonbeams! None here can kill me, I know! My brain is all afire!"

"What ails you? Oh, what ails you? Why, why these wild words?" She seized my hand where I clutched the door. "Oh! oh!" she cried. "As I feared! As I feared!" Her voice died out in a shudder, and she sank back into the darkness of the coach.

Cadwaller still struggled with his horse. He had great difficulty to retain his seat, for more than once the branches almost swept him to the ground. Toby, at the other side, still made the night to ring with blows and mocking shouts. The other men fought back and forth, hard pressed and harder pressing; their horses plunging, rearing, circling, pawing dust, while cut and thrust shot through the greenish light unceasingly. The man upon the driver's seat now had his hands well filled, for the sound and flash of savage steel alarmed his horses. They plunged and reared, ran back this way and that, and called the lash well into play.

"Why do you stand back, my Lord?" I laughed. "Come forth! Come forth!"

His horse sprang high in air and dashed far out, goaded to fury by the spur. I raised my point and rushed to meet him. A curse from Cadwaller, a flourish from me, and the maddened beast swung

quickly to one side, seized the bit between its teeth and plunged beneath the trees. On he rushed, the little branches snapping as he went.

"Ha! ha!" I laughed, "you're saved, my Lord, for a few short moments longer!"

I sprang toward the gate, dodged quickly through the group of wheeling horses and reached to lift the heavy bar.

But something made me turn my head. A beating of horses' hoofs came down the drive from the direction of the house. I then saw the reason for the pistol-shot and cheers and shouts when we came into view: 'twas a signal to them that waited—the remnant of his Lordship's band.

I turned again to lift the bar; but my eyes, burning like coals of fire, seeing everything, and—I felt—casting two bright searching lights, flashed upon something that made me catch my breath.

I was directly before the porter's lodge. No light was burning within, but the door stood wide open. For the last five minutes not a thought of Julius had crossed my mind; but now, with the open door before me, another chill ran through my burning frame. That hideous thing was not human. Where did it lurk in the darkness? What hellish plan did it have afoot? I lifted one end of the bar—and dropped it to the ground.

"'Od's life!" I gasped, and raised my pistol.

From a dark corner of the lodge a black form had

sprung. In its hand was a knife—the moon gleamed upon it. The men were fighting furiously, but poor Denton had been forced back because of weakness from his wound. His antagonist drove blow upon blow in heavy swings straight at his head. But the hardy fellow caught them manfully, slowly giving ground toward the lodge. The black figure darted at him from the rear, drew back its knife and struck a coward's blow at the horse's leg. My pistol failed me. I threw it at the devil's head and sprang toward him—but too late. The poor beast snorted and threw high its head, fell back upon its haunches, then toppled to its side. The other mounted fellow swung about and faced me readily He spurred his beast and dashed at me. But I flung my hat in the horse's face and rushed at the fiend in black.

During all this Toby still fought at the other side, his mounted opponent proving his manhood thoroughly by holding out so long against that mighty blade. The coach-horses still reared and plunged. Despite the driver's lash they forced the carriage back and to one side, under the great limbs of a tree.

"Now, murdering dog, you face me for the last; this time upon the ground!" I swore and drew my sword.

He shrank back from me into the deeper shadows, snarling like a kicked mad dog.

The sounds of galloping down the drive drew near;—they thundered across the bridge

I sprang after Julius, but a rush came behind me, and I wheeled just in time to guard a heavy blow aimed at my head by the fellow whose horse I had frightened. I slapped the beast upon the flank with the flat of my blade, and it reared and danced unmanageably about. The fellow gasped out a curse, and struck a back-hand blow. He missed me, and I made a lunge at Julius, who had darted at my back from the shadows, when he saw me occupied. It seemed impossible to injure the creature; he avoided my steel like a snake.

"Here! I am your victim! Why do you not seek me?"

In horror I turned my face to the coach. Great God! there she stood by the open door.

"Come! I am your victim!" she repeated, while the struggle lulled.

"Back, Madam! Back! Into the coach!" I shouted wildly, and sprang toward her over poor Denton and his stricken horse.

Instead of obeying, she darted into the deep shadows of the trees. Julius dashed after her, ere I could cut him off.

At that moment Cadwaller's reinforcements came thundering down, passed the coach and through us, slashing to right and left.

"Oh, God, she is lost!" I groaned, and plunged beneath the trees in the path of the black devil in human form. I saw her noble object in this seem-

ing madness. She thought to save me by leading off my enemies.

Under the first tree I met Cadwaller face to face. His hat was gone, and he staggered as though stunned. He had been brushed from his maddened horse. I struck him aside with an arm of fire and sent him reeling from my path; then on I dashed, following the sound of rustling garments.

The burning, maddening fever had spread with such a quickness that it now covered my whole body. It scorched my feet, my hands, my head, and parched my throat. My brain throbbed, my eyes ached as though being twisted from my head, and my side spurred me on with every breath. But still the fever gave me strength. 'Twas unnatural, to be sure, but strength it was, and I thanked God for it; for without that deadly burning, no power on earth could have forced me to walk a step. As it was I ran, and ran lightly, too. I seemed to have no weight. I flew along, taking great steps, my toes scarce touching earth. In faith, I seemed to have not weight enough, for it made my steps uncertain, and my path most difficult to keep.

I heard the crash of blows behind, but heard it in a dream. Toby and the other men would be overcome, I knew. Poor, faithful little Toby! No surrender would there be in him. To the end he would fight, and more than one ruffian should stand before his God ere the brave little swordman's arm should

fail. And now, at the last moment, all our efforts were in vain. We had sworn not to fail, even if we should go under. We had clasped hands upon it at the little bridge. And now no chance seemed left.

I banished Toby from my mind, and hurled myself along. Once or twice, as he crossed a patch of moonlit greensward, I caught sight of the accursed Julius. His long slim back was bent like that of a hunting wolf; he wore no hat, and his straight and dead black hair was streaming as a mane far out behind.

"Halt, murdering devil, halt!" I roared.

He ran but faster with each shout I gave.

I tore my hair in torturous madness, and rushed on like a raging fury.

The trees stood in my way; the bushes snapped beneath my feet. The trees I dodged; the bushes I went through or over; but still I gained no foot in the race of life and death. The pace was an agony. I could not realise that a lady could run so fast. The thought came to me that mayhap Julius had given up the chase and now was fleeing for his life. But with the next breath this dear hope was shattered; the lady crossed a patch of open ground like a hunted fawn. In the centre she glanced back wildly. Even at the distance I was behind, I could see her eyes open wider in a sudden terror, as she caught sight of the black devil behind her. She uttered a little cry and ran the faster. I leaped a bush and strained my

every muscle. My sword I grasped in a hand of fire and dragged it behind through bushes and round trees.

With every step I took I burned the fiercer. I felt that soon my head would burst. My skull seemed filled with fiery coals. My temples swelled with the straining heat; and my eyes were bursting from their sockets. Tightly I locked my left hand in my hair and pressed a temple to relieve the pain. But on, still on, I flew.

The lady again came into view. She was in the path—she was crossing the bridge. A curse upon my tardiness! Julius was gaining rapidly; and—yes—I was losing ground!

I shouted aloud, but my voice sounded like a woman's scream of pain. No sign did Julius give that he heard my call, but on he glided, snake-like, and still bent low.

A moment later I was on the little bridge. I saw the fleeing lady turn suddenly from the path. Ah! I saw her object. Driven to despair, and without hope of reaching the house before she should be overtaken, she had turned toward the arbour—her little paradise.

I saw a chance. Mayhap she meant that I should see it. If I could be but fleet enough of foot, I might yet be in time. She was taking a circuitous course, so I might still have time to cut across from the bridge and reach the arbour before Julius could

come up. I laughed wildly at the thought. My voice was high, like that of a frightened child. Through the bushes I dashed, and, crouching low, rushed on toward the little home of roses by the stream.

The birds fled blindly from their nests—I sped along. The briers scratched me and the branches cut—I prayed and darted on. The stream bowed in and crossed my path—I cursed and swung aside. The moon went out behind a cloud—I screamed in madness and groped my way ahead.

I heard a cry a little farther on. Then voices, mingled and raised high, came to me. For a moment my heart stood still. One voice was hers. I should hear that in my grave. It came from the arbour. I must have run more slowly than I thought. Too late! He would kill her ere I could interfere. And the accursed moon still sulked behind the cloud. All, all, all seemed against me!

I hurled myself through the bushes, slashing to right and left with my sword. Ah! I was coming near now. I heard her voice, gasping rebuke and entreaty. But the black devil snarled a reply that made my blood run cold. I uttered no shout now, lest I should warn him of how close I was, and so drive him to his hellish work ere I could reach him and prevent. I sprang onward as lightly as possible—and, freed now from the bushes, darted through the darkness toward that gasping, pleading voice.

The cloud passed from the moon. There was the arbour, but a few yards off, and above me. I had run to the water's edge. I rushed forward, slanting up the bank. My foot crashed into a bush; the earth sprang up, and I rolled, struggling painfully, until my hand struck the water.

"Ah! there is your great soldier now. I failed to finish him last night; but he'll not be long behind you, Mistress." 'Twas the voice of the human devil.

I turned over and drew my wet hand across my face of fire.

"Oh, Julius, Julius, I never have been aught but kind to you! Why, why do you seek my poor sad life?"

He laughed, but it sounded like the snarl of a wolf.

"Oh, I am only a poor hideous creature—that's what you said to him—only a dog, to be petted and kicked! I heard you say as much when I listened in the secret passage!" He snapped the words out as though they choked him.

"Oh, Julius!" I heard her gasp.

I scrambled to my feet, and started stealthily up the bank. I could see them darkly cut against the sky.

"If I let you live one of those three will have you. If not this Everard, then either my Lord or Sir Charles. But I'll outwit them all!" Again he laughed.

She shrank back from him and clung to a shrub for support. I crouched very low, that I might not be seen until I could make one rush and reach him ere he could use his knife.

"And—and 'twas you,—last night?" she gasped. She was just beginning to realise the meaning of his wild words. "Oh, Julius Julius, you would murder me!" She put her hand to her forehead and leaned forward to peer into the savage face in search of a sign of relenting. But the moon shone on it. It was terrible. "Is it—is it madness, Julius?" Her voice was tremulous, but low and almost pitying.

"Madness! Ha! ha! yes, madness!" He threw back his head and laughed wildly, his black hair shaking around his face, lending it a look more unnatural still. "Madness it is; but in another 'twould be christened 'love'!" He leaned toward her, his eyes flashing and lips grinning repulsively.

"Ah!" I snarled, but smothered the cry with my fingers.

"Oh, Julius!" the lady screamed, and drew back, her hand before her face.

"Oh, you cry out at that, Mistress!" he hissed. "I am the dog, the hideous creature; I am the porter, and you loathe me! Now you know why you must die!"

The moonlight in the air turned red as blood; a mist of blood floated before my eyes. This was the

cause of my hatred. From the first I knew there was some deep reason in my wish to crush him. I wriggled up the bank, all red before me, the devil gnawing at my heart. If I might kill this fiend the fever then might take its fatal course. When he should be dead, I could die in almost peace.

"I knew this day would come," he went on savagely; "I knew that nothing but this could be the end! I put it off until the last moment; but when I saw that longer delay would mean my failure, I tried to strike. But that half-dead fool lying down the bank there prowled like a cat and guarded you too well. I made sure to finish him, but in that also I failed, it seems. No matter, he shall go to-night, soon after you. They'll hang me if they catch me, but what care I? Here I live in hell; so why should I not go down below? Ha! ha! ha! 'twill be a great party! Heron Hall shall be red with blood!" Again the fiend laughed wildly and thrust his ghastly face toward her.

Mistress Heron shrank back in terror and disgust, one hand held up for protection, the other behind her, as though to feel her way. Two cautious steps she took backward, moving slowly toward the stream, ere he detected her plan.

"Ah," he snarled angrily, "none of that! Your fate is sealed! Your time is come!" He seized her arm and drew her struggling to him.

I measured the distance with bursting eyes. A

little more and I could do it in one rush. I crouched still lower and drew myself along.

"Ah," he cried, "'tis not because I hate you that I kill you; 'tis because I love you, love you! But I'm the porter, the dog, so you must die! But first come to me—here, yes, here!" He wrapped his long black arms around her.

"Oh, God!" she gasped, straining to break free. Her hand she pressed against his throat, her head she turned away, wild and terrified. She screamed and called for help, struck with both hands and scratched, flung her head from side to side in frantic efforts to avoid his beast-like, searching face.

The madness overcame my will; all caution left me in a yell of hate. I shot up the bank like a springing cat, and dashed to where she fought for life and all.

"Die, hellish devil, die!" I snarled, and flashed my blade at his long, gaunt neck.

He bent snake-like to one side; the steel but grazed his skin.

His victim tore herself half-free, and her one hand grasped my shoulder. But still he held her with one arm around her waist.

"Ha!—you!" he snapped, and raised his knife, his eyes blazing like balls of fire, and his teeth flashing in the moonlight.

I tried to tear her from him, and shortened my blade again to run him through.

"Too late!" he grinned, and the steel shot down.

I tried to catch it on my hilt or arm—too late! I saw it strike her bosom and disappear. A groan escaped her lips, and her whole weight hung upon my arm. I choked with a tearing at my heart, and struck with a cry of madness—but too late! He sprang back out of reach, cast but one backward glance of exultation, and fled into the blackness of the trees.

CHAPTER XXI.

My heart stood still, then fluttered like that of a wounded bird; my brain grew heavy, then burned again with a fierceness indescribable.

"Murdered!" I gasped, and stared around at the bushes dazedly. "Failed at the last! Permitted her to be killed before my eyes! No! It must be a dream, or the madness of the fever! She cannot be dead! Why, I feel no weight upon my arm! And yet, there she hangs, limp and lifeless! Oh, it is a dream or a madness; I could not hold her so if it were real! I'm wounded, burning with fever from neglect and cold. I surely have not the strength to move, much less, therefore, to hold this lady here upon my arm without an effort. No, no! I'm lying in some spot beneath the trees, or in a bed. 'Tis a dream—the imagining of a burning brain. Soon I shall awake and find all well. If I shout, will it waken me? It sometimes does, they say. I'll try."

I raised my voice and shouted with all my power. It sounded high-pitched, wild and unnatural. I shuddered and drew back. The body moved with me. I dropped to my knee and grasped her hand. She seemed to be all red, as were the trees and ground.

"No dream!" I choked. "My God, no dream!

Yes, he struck her here; I saw the knife sink into her tender bosom! Oh, God! am I mad or is it real? I cannot see! All, all is red!" I permitted her to sink to the grass, cursed, tore my hair, and wept in agony. I dug my burning knuckles into my half-blind eyes to try to sweep away that mist of blood. Then, bending low, I held my face close to her bosom and peered through my fingers in search of the fatal gash. My whole soul went into that straining look. I would see, before my sight should be completely gone. The moon was very dim now—it was struggling through thin fleecy clouds—, and the red before my eyes grew stronger. But I saw a rent in her gown—a great gash where the steel had cut down. I shuddered as I saw it, for it ran towards the heart. But yet I saw no blood—that is, no darker spot, for all was red to me.

Ah, here!" I trembled, and fearfully inserted a finger in the rent, expecting it to come out dark and wet. "What's this?" I gasped—"What's this?" My finger met no blood nor flesh, but something hard and crackling. The knife seemed to have cut only the outer garment. I seized her hand again and felt her wrist; but my fingers burned and trembled so that I could not feel a pulse.

The moon went out again behind a cloud. I shook my clenched fist at it and ground my teeth in rage. I bent my head against her swelling breast and listened for a beating there; but the throbbing in my

head and the ringing in my ears were loud enough to drown all gentle sounds.

She sighed. I held my breath and listened, fearing some trick of my now untrusty brain. . . . Again she sighed, then uttered a little moan. I cried aloud in a wild and choking sob. "Oh, God, she lives!" I laughed and wept. Again she moaned softly; and I gently raised her head.

The devil take the moon!" I snarled. "She'll die here in the dark! To the house! She must have care, and a woman's gentleness! To the house! I'll face them all! I'll cut through an army, but she shall not die! My dying curses on this darkness!"

Still grasping my sword, I raised her tenderly and stumbled on toward the path. Strange as it may seem, I felt her weight but little—it seemed a shadow that I held. I stepped along lightly, still blind and burning. I walked on air, but wandered wide, far from my path. I halted now and then and strained my eyes to penetrate the gloom, that I might make out some tree or bush that would guide me to my destination.

"'Tis sad," I muttered, but the words broke shrilly on my ears. I stopped and stared around to see if 'twas one that mocked me in the darkness. Nothing could I see but the dull pink mist, with here and there a darker, tapering patch, where stood a tree or some fantastic bush cut to deformity by the gardener's knife. "Yes, faith, 'tis sad—the saddest sight I

have seen yet. Persecuted by that beast, our King; then hounded by his menial dog; driven to despair; bought and sold as tradesman's ware; at last struck down by a hellish porter's knife! And all before your face, Mark Everard! The fever seized you opportunely, for it hides your blushes well! Failed miserably at every point, and yet have struck no blow in her revenge! Ha! no, not yet; but, by her life, I will! They both shall die before the moon goes down!" I paused and stared up at the misty light. She broke free from the clouds and smiled down sadly at me.

I lost all thought of place and time. I wandered through the shrubs and trees, now in the path, now far astray. My thought was that in my arms I bore her soul, and with it I must reach the house. The moon went out and reappeared with every step I took. The pink mist deepened and grew pale again at every breath I drew. My sword cut through the bushes and struck against the trees. But on, still on, I wandered, with bursting head and stabbing side, my mind still drawing me toward the great dark pile standing against the sky.

At last I broke out upon the lawn and swung unevenly across the grass.

In one room the lights were burning—'twas in the room where first I had broken fast at Heron Hall. My maddened mind was playing me strange tricks. The incident of the mirror as I left that room that

morning stood out before my eyes in bold relief. Clearly I saw Sir Charles glance at Sir Alfred, and the other shoot the meaning glance at him.

"Watch that mirror closely," came to me in a whisper. I thought it was her voice that spoke. I peered into her face, lying upon my shoulder, but she only sighed.

"She lives!'" I croaked again, and stumbled dreamily along.

"Where am I?—Oh!" she moaned, and raised her head.

"Alive!" I gasped. "Alive!"

She struggled, and stared into my face. "You live! You live!" she cried, still stunned.

"Ha! ha! I live! Ay, for a little yet. My work is still to do. But you, Madam, you are near to death, I fear."

For a moment more she stared with a look of agony into my face, her hand holding back my hair. "But you—ah, this is awful! You——" She broke off abruptly, pressed her hand to her forehead and moaned aloud.

I marched on grimly, steering a zigzag course toward the house.

"Oh, you are carrying me! Let me walk!" she commanded suddenly.

"Ha! ha! Nay, hush; you are dying! I saw the devil's blade fleshed to the hilt in your bosom! Hush, hush!" I soothed. "A little while and we

shall reach the house. 'Tis a night of blood, Madam, and few here shall see the morrow dawn. I have not killed him yet, but I shall before my mad head shall burst."

She shuddered and tried to wriggle to the ground.

"Calm, Madam, calm! I feel no weight. I walk in the red mist as in a dream. Rest, rest; you are killed, I fear. But go not yet! Rest! Wait for me! I have work still to do!"

"I am not killed!" she cried. "Oh, no, 'tis you, 'tis you! Let me walk! Please let me walk! You —you will not refuse me! I am not killed, nor even scratched! I am but bruised! Permit me to walk! Please permit me to walk! See, I am well! You will grant me this?" She was half-sobbing as she coaxed me as though I were a child.

"Ha! she thinks that I am mad," I muttered. "She thinks I did not see him stab her. Ha! but I still know what's afoot. Ha! ha! I'm still alive, and will know what's afoot until the end."

Again she shuddered and tried to reach the ground. But I held her fast, and wandered slowly on. Her hand flew to her bosom, and I saw her eyes grow wider as she felt the rent. I heard a crackling sound, but took no heed and forced across the lawn.

"Look! See!" she said with shaking voice. "See, see! It saved my life!"

I blinked and stared at the thing she held before me.

"Do you see? Can you—can you see?" she stammered tenderly.

"'Tis red—all red with blood!"

Her head again sank upon my shoulder, and her whole form shook with weeping. "Oh, no, no, no!" she sobbed. "'Tis the parchment—the King's warrant—, which you used as a trumpet in speaking through the keyhole. It fell at my feet when that devil tried to shoot you. I put it—I put it in my bosom, because—because I—I wanted it as—as—a—a keepsake. Oh, cannot you see? It saved my life. His knife must have glanced when it struck it. Now—now will you let me walk? 'Tis you, poor soul, that should be borne!" She still kept her face upon my shoulder, and her breast still shook with emotion.

"What! Not killed?—nor scratched?" My heart leaped and burned like fire, and my voice sounded like the yelp of a dog.

"No, no! I am but bruised! Please let me walk! Please—please!"

I heard a rush of feet behind me, and a shout—an oath—roll out much farther off. I wheeled and snarled through the red moonlight, ready to bite at friend or foe.

A tall dark form, bent low, and with drawn sword, was running swiftly at me. He wore no hat, and I soon made out his face to be Cadwaller's. Far down the lawn—below the last terrace—a score or so of

mounted men were coming slowly up. I heard one shout aloud in a sharp, commanding voice.

"Stop that madman! The other must be blind! He'll kill him! Stop it, I say!"

Another, and little, figure was also coming on at his greatest speed. The oath I heard had come from him. Again he swore and shouted out a loud command. 'Twas Toby—I recognised the voice.

Cadwaller glanced but once behind to see how far the little man was still away, and then again he sprang toward me. His eyes were wild and fierce in the reddish mist; his clothes were rent where the branches had scratched him when his frightened horse had run away; and his hair swung back and forth across his face.

"At last!" he hissed, stopping just beyond a sword-reach. "Which must I fight this time?" he sneered.

"Oh, God is good!" I croaked. "Now you shall die, base dog!"

I put Mistress Heron to her feet and, though she fought to stand before me, forced her behind my back. One quick glance I shot at the running Toby and the fast approaching horsemen, then sprang savagely upon the knave, that I might end all ere they could interfere. I thought it strange that there should be so many mounted men; but I had not time to think the reason out—the knave before me occupied my mind as well as blade. He met me in hot haste; his

wish was as my own. In a moment he would kill me, was his thought, I knew. A few passes, and the wounded, fever-maddened fool that joined with him so bravely would stare at the moon in death. I laughed shrilly as I read his thought.

"Ha! ha! you're red, my Lord. Watch well this bloody blade. Soon it will turn you white. Ha! 'tis a rare good night for killing, for the air is full of blood."

Lunge after lunge he flashed, without a heart-beat's intermission; feint after feint he made—but all in vain. My arm was like a fiery thunderbolt. It sprang to meet his every stroke. I read each feint or trick before it was performed. I chuckled as I put his blows aside, and darted out my point like a tongue of flame. I knew he could not scratch me, for I was but a shadow of myself. I did not fight; it was my soul. My body lay dead in some spot beneath the trees, and the spirit of Mark Everard stayed still upon the earth to see his work complete. This knave should die, I swore, and by my hand. There still were obstacles in my way, but I would overcome them. I burned from head to foot and suffered these great tortures in my brain and heart but that I should make haste. I was half in hell, half out. Her persecutors should be blotted from the earth, then I should sink to rest. My feet scarce touched the earth; but as a shadow I floated in the mist. I heard the rush of horses' feet draw near, then Toby's

shout rang out louder. I pressed my antagonist more furiously, and all his thrusts turned into guards. His mouth was open now, and I could hear his gasps for breath even above the throbbing in my head and the crash and screech of steel.

"Ha! look, my Lord, how red you are with blood! A little and you'll be far redder yet!"

He shrank back step by step; but I danced around him and cut great arcs of flame about his head. But still he did guard him well. He gave no ground until his fate was sealed but for a backward step. I saw him try to work his way round, that he might get Mistress Heron between us. I laughed and shifted as I forced him back, and balked his coward's plan. I saw something dark a step or two behind him. I pressed him hard and strained my eyes to make out what it was. Presently I saw it clearly. 'Twas the sun-dial near the house. He shifted a little and saw it too.

"Mad devil!" he gasped, and sprang far back behind it.

The horses thundered up and wheeled around us. At the same instant I heard Toby shout.

"The man that lifts a hand against him dies!" His breath was almost spent with his long and up-hill run.

"Stop this mad work!" I heard another shout. 'Twas the voice of him that had called before, and bade his men to prevent the Earl's attack.

I looked around to see the man that spoke with such authority. Mistress Heron stood by my side, her hand held to the rent in her gown. Her face was set, and her pose resolute. She was looking up at a man that rode a great dark horse. He was the speaker, I could see. He wore what seemed to me a plain black masque. That he was the leader could be noted at a glance, for the others clustered in a semi-circle in the rear. Toby stood next the lady, leaning upon his sword and glaring at the band of near a score disdainfully. My Lord hung upon the dial and gasped for breath.

I heard the roll of wheels, and turned and peered down toward the gate. . . . The coach was coming up the drive with an escort of three or four.

The circumstances had undergone a rapid change. I wondered if this masqued man was Sir Charles. I could think of none other likely to arrive. The voice I had heard before, but it sounded not like his. I stared again at the tall dark form, but his masque and hat disguised him thoroughly.

"My Lord of Cadwaller, you will please to come with me," he said, riding up beside the sun-dial, and speaking very low. "And you, Master Everard, will put up your sword. This bloodshed has gone too far already." His voice was calm but cold, and he spoke as one well used to be obeyed. Again I thought I had heard the voice before, but my ears rang and my head swam so that I could not place it.

"It is my habit, Sir, to draw my sword and sheath it at my command alone. Nor do I permit of interference. This—*this* must die to-night, before the moon goes down. I see him dead already. There's a blade sunk in his heart." I pointed to the cringing Earl, but he only stared up at the horseman.

Mistress Heron's arm was trembling against mine; and when he of the masque sprang to the ground and stepped toward us, she shrank back partly behind me, as though she feared the stranger.

I raised my point and held him at a distance.

"Drop that! Are you mad? Do you not know me?" he demanded in low sharp tones that could not reach his men.

"Put it down, Sir," Toby whispered in my ear. "We'll soon have another chance. Please wait, Sir."

I looked at Toby sharply, then at the masqued man before me,—and let my point sink to the ground. There was some mystery here; Toby and the lady seemed to know the other.

"Will you come to the house, Madam?" he said, bending low. "This has been a mad, mad evening, I fear. Permit me, Madam." He held out a long, slim hand toward her.

She shuddered, hesitated, and drew a little farther back.

"Go," I whispered.

She slowly put out her hand and placed the points

of her trembling fingers upon his. He smiled and turned with courtly grace toward the steps. His men all were dismounted now, and bore their horses' reins upon their arms.

"My Lord Cadwaller will join me in the Hall at once," the masqued man paused to say.

The lady walked on half-unwillingly, her eyes, still wide, turned back to me.

I seemed to die and come to life with each succeeding breath. The reddish mist turned black in spots, then changed to almost white. I leaned upon my blade and gazed my heart out after the two slow-moving forms.

Cadwaller left his post, and, glancing back at me, strode quickly in an arc toward the door.

Again Mistress Heron looked back to where I stood with staunch old Toby by my side. I saw her raise her hand, I thought; and Toby moved uneasily and took my arm.

"On, Toby; we must follow. All seems not over yet."

We moved on quickly after them, Toby guiding my uneven steps

"Her lover has arrived at last," I groaned. "Now may the outcast make his exit gracefully. . . . But still there's Julius," I muttered. "Julius is my peculiar prey."

CHAPTER XXII.

UPON the steps the masqued gentleman again paused for a moment. He turned to one that followed him at the head of the band and beckoned him to him. The other went quickly forward and entered the house at his heels. The men formed up around the door and closed in, as though to prevent us from passing. But never am I easily turned aside, so I walked straight on until I met with forceful opposition.

"You may not enter here, Sir," said a fellow in my path.

At this there was a little uproar, which ended when the door again flew open and he that had entered last put out his head.

"Permit these men to pass!" he called. "Strike me dead! have you not had blows enough, Master Everard?"

"I still have some to strike, Sir Charles," I said. It was the Baronet. The moon was shining on his face.

"Split me!" he gasped, as the light from within shone in my face. "What ails you, Sir? Your face is almost purple! 'Od's life! and the blood! You're soaked in blood all down your side and leg!"

He drew back from me, as though I had been a ghost.

"Blood!" I laughed. "Blood!—only blood? And my face, you say, is almost purple? Why yours, Sir Charles, is red, quite red. Hist! Sir Charles; I'll tell a secret. There are some about that I must kill. When they be dead, I shall no longer haunt you. I and my bloody mist shall vanish. But tell me, what is your friend within?" And without waiting for an answer I floated into the room.

"Mad as the devil! Keep your eye on him; he may do a great damage," I heard him mutter to Toby as I passed.

I smiled at his wisdom and advanced toward the table, with Sir Charles and Toby at my heels.

At one end of the table, with a hand held to her bosom, another on the board, Mistress Heron stood; at one side was my Lord Cadwaller, and by his side stood—the King.

"Oh! oh!" the lady gasped, and drew back, shaking like a willow in a breeze.

"'Slife!" cried the King, and stepped back too.

The Earl's eyes opened wide, and he shifted uneasily, but made no sound.

I bowed, and leaned upon my hilt, smiling at the two in satisfaction. The King's presence came to me as a shock, but as a joyous one. He had come to me, not I to him. All my work might now be set-

tled in one stroke. Sir Charles, his Lordship, and the King! Julius was the only missing card. Another shuffle, and I could bring him out. For several moments I stood thus smiling at my fortune, while they all stood back transfixed with horror. . . . I must have been a sorry sight.

"'Od's blood! is this your work, Cadwaller?" the King cried out.

"No, your Majesty," I put in ere the other could answer; "the Earl was not expert enough. He tried only to complete the work of another; but even in that he failed." I felt my lips still smiling, but they did it without my wish.

"When did this happen?" His voice was sharp, and his brows drew together angrily.

Sometime last night, Sir; after midnight, as I think."

"And you have been thus ever since?—'Tis monstrous!"

"Oh, no! I have been tended with a care far past my deserving. But my Lord was something impatient, and would be moving. But there—all that is passed; I have a suspicion that I died an hour since."

Mistress Heron moved back unsteadily and sank into a chair, her head bowed upon her bosom.

"He's mad!" said the King, as to himself. "See him put to bed and well attended," he turned to Toby and directed.

"First I have work to do; then I shall bid you all a long good-night."

Again he looked at me closely, but turned away with a shudder. "To a private room," he almost whispered to my Lord.

The latter glanced around, then stepped to the door of the morning-room, where I had seen the lights burning when I broke out from beneath the trees.

I waited until the door had closed behind them, then turned to Toby. "Guard Mistress Heron well. Stand by her side until you hear from me," I whispered.

He looked at me closely, his face drawn with sorrow, but he obeyed my order however unwillingly.

I swayed for a moment, took a step toward the door through which the others had passed—and sank heavily to one knee. Instantly the little man was at my side, helping me to my feet. I thanked him with a grasp of my hand and motioned him back to the lady's chair. Then with a great effort I held myself erect, and walked deliberately to the door, each muscle trembling with the strain to keep my knees from giving way again. My weight was coming back, and as it came my fever-strength forsook me.

Sir Charles came to my side as I put my hand upon the door-knob. "Better not enter there, Master Everard. The King is in the devil's own rage, and will not like the intrusion, I assure you." He put his hand upon my arm to restrain me.

"In a rage, Sir Charles!" I laughed. "Faith, he's like to be in a worse." I shook his hand from my arm. "And you, Sir Charles—have you business with me still, or have you objections to quarrelling with a ghost?" I whispered, smiling in his face.

He looked at me pityingly. "My game, I fear, is up." He shook his head mournfully. "I know it is up so far as you are concerned. The King has discovered too much. The Little Duke is out of favour, and I am to be sent to France when Madam of Orleans shall return home. My efforts to expose the plot for the Queen's abduction were too successful—it showed the part that the Little Duke and I have played too plainly. 'Twas a slip I made that did it, so I am forced to make a virtue of necessity, and go where I am sent. But we have thrown Cadwaller from his height. The King now knows of all his villainy. But this comes too late to be of use to you. Spilt me, but I am sorry, Sir! You have played a great part to the end. Though we have been on opposing sides, I never have been able to subdue my admiration for you. Damn me for a fool! but will you shake my hand before you die, and let the past be past? I have lost through my own lack of skill; but I believe you would have beaten me anyway." He held his hand, palm up—so frankly—to me.

I leaned against the door-frame, shifted my sword

from right hand to left, and took the proffered pledge of peace.

"Your news comes too late to save me, as you say; but it will permit me to leave my work complete. She shall not be bought and sold, nor confiscated by the Crown." I bent to him and spoke in a voice that could not reach her ears.

"I think there is no great danger of the last," he whispered. "The lady of whom I spoke last night —Mademoiselle Querouaille—seems assured of the Royal favour. This being the case, and considering the effect that the discovery of Cadwaller's treachery will have upon the King, 'tis not unlikely that his Majesty will be content with his imported beauty."

I felt my teeth clench savagely, but still I smiled. "I will make sure," I nodded. "The obstacles are fading quickly, but Julius remains. Nothing but his death can relieve me there."

"Ah! was it Julius?"

"Ay, the dog! He would have killed her. I prevented that, but he escaped. Again to-night he sought her life, but by a lucky chance she once more escaped. My poor false strength is going fast—but he must die. I know not if I live or if I died an hour since. A fire burns me up and steals my wits; but yet before I leave, that knave shall die, or he will kill her. Now I must hasten and see the King. My knees are treacherously giving way, and my heart

chokes me with its bubbling. If I am flesh and blood, that means the end."

"Farewell, Sir," he said, watching me uneasily, as though to see me fall. "Before me, I am sorry. But rest in peace. If you go before you have had your revenge, I'll see to the knave myself. 'Tis a duty I owe you, for I set him to dog your steps."

"Ah, so I thought. Farewell, Sir Charles." My brain was reeling and my tongue was growing very thick. A longer delay would leave my time too short.

I turned a look upon Mistress Heron. She was lying back in her chair, very pale, her eyes closed, as though she slept. Toby was at her side, pressing a glass of wine to her lips, while the maid, Martha, wept and stroked the lady's hand.

My senses were becoming very dull, or I had heard Martha enter. Before they should forsake me forever I must see the King. I turned the knob and reeled unsteadily into the morning room.

The King's back was turned toward the door, as he moved slowly down the room, with hands clasped behind him and head bent forward thoughtfully. Cadwaller stood beside the great mirror near the door, his back against the wall, his right hand grasping his sword-belt where it passed across his breast, while his left was opening and closing quickly. The look that he turned on me was filled with a venomous hate. His eyes blazed, and his hand stole to his hilt.

But I only smiled in satisfaction, for his whole appearance bespoke the fallen favourite driven to despair by his ill fortune. He was no longer dangerous, unless one's back were turned—then beware of a thrust between the shoulders; for so does a desperate coward strike.

"Yes, Cadwaller, you may keep company with your friends in France," said the King, still walking from me. "But remember," he cried angrily, turning quickly as he spoke, "if I hear of any more plotting, the Channel shall not save you; for—'Od's life!" he broke off, as he caught sight of me. "Your madness carries you too far, Master Everard! Leave the room, Sir!"

In the middle of his outburst I had shut the door; and now I stood with my back against it, my eyes turning from Cadwaller to him.

"Your Majesty will pardon me, I know," I smiled.

"You take much for granted, Sir!" he snapped.

"I have business of importance, Sir."

"It must wait. And while waiting, have the respect to sheathe your sword."

"A few short moments and my wait is like to be a long one, Sir. And as for my sword, I fear to look toward its scabbard. My garments there are stiff, and make my head to whirl the faster."

His face softened a little, and he spoke humour-

ingly. "Well, well, what is your business? Be brief, for my time is short."

"Have I done my work well, Sir?"

He frowned. "But too well. One good service you have done me; I am relieved of the duty of punishing the treason of Sir Alfred Heron. His death is fortunate."

I glanced at Cadwaller. He was still glaring at me savagely, but his eyes shifted as I looked.

"I have no wish to rob my Lord Cadwaller of his right. Sir Alfred died not by the blade; 'twas from a stroke, brought on by the revelation of his Lordship's plans."

The Earl sneered. "You accuse his Majesty as well as me. My plans were his as much as mine."

The King's face worked passionately for a moment, but he kept his rage within.

"Pray proceed, Master Everard," he said calmly, but under great restraint.

"I have done my work, Sir; now I must have my reward."

"Must! I am not used to that word, Sir."

"No? 'Tis one of my most common."

"Your madness runs to insolence, it would seem."

"No, Sir; to perseverance."

"When used against me they are one and inseparable. Be brief. What would you?"

"A fortnight since I undertook to do you a service. I have finished it."

"Yes, yes; but what is your request?" he snapped out impatiently, as I paused for breath.

"I undertook the service more out of curiosity than for aught else. I thought your Majesty was more desirous of having Mistress Heron returned to you than you were to punish Sir Alfred for his attack upon the Queen."

"'Od's fish!" he broke out, and partly turned away. Doubtless such words to the King came as a rude shock.

"I was not sure, however, and so decided to accept your commission, with mental reservations. I came here, arrested the persons named in your warrant, and reported to your Majesty, as you know."

"You persist in disregarding my command. What is your request? I ask you for the last time."

I went on, without heeding his impatience. "From the moment that I sent you that report, Sir, I have been working to defeat your plans. I fought against Lord Cadwaller tooth and nail. In that I have won. He came armed with the King's authority—therefore I fought the King. For I saw that Sir Alfred was but the dupe of this knave" (I pointed to the Earl), "and that the charge of attempting abduction against him was being used but that the King's wish respecting his daughter might the more easily succeed."

My Lord moved excitedly. Doubtless he could not comprehend such madness. The King swore

and walked a few steps from me, but again turned when I continued:

"I have dared to oppose you, Sir, because you were unjust."

He laughed aloud. "'Slife, Sir, your impudence lacks not in humour! A soldier of fortune lectures his King on justice and morality! Pray proceed."

"I merely state facts, your Majesty. I would to God they were not! 'Tis not for me to moralise, but yet I hate oppression. The lady in the next room has been cruelly oppressed and persecuted beyond endurance. I have made it my work to see this cease, and if king or devil stood to oppose, still would I stand for justice!"

"Treason has flourished well, and still shows no signs of failing strength. I was wise to bring a guard to this nest of traitors! But come, your request, pray. Put it in plain terms. 'Od's life! I am curious."

"'Tis not much, your Majesty. I pray for justice only—not a great favour for a King to grant."

"If you had justice you should have a halter, as should some others here about." (He glanced meaningly at the Earl). "But I am unjust, you say, so you may not be rewarded as you richly deserve."

"Mistress Heron, by the death of her father, is now the ward of the King. I pray the King to release her—to give her her freedom. And as you

still believe that Sir Alfred was a party to the plot to abduct her Majesty the Queen, I also pray that you will take no steps that will cause her a loss of her inheritance. 'Tis not too great a favour for a great King to grant."

"Nor too great a favour for so loyal a subject to demand."

"I always have heard that King Charles is generous—almost to a fault."

"Generous to a fault, but unjust," he again sneered, slipping a ring on and off, and watching me from beneath sullen brow. "The virtue and the fault seem not well to blend, my master of insult and flattery."

"They alternate, Sir."

"And why comes this so small request from you, and not from Mistress Heron?" He was burning with rage, and provokingly amused, which made my hopes sink lower.

"Mistress Heron has despaired of ever being freed from molestation, and she knows not even that what her father may have done when living may be brought against his estate now that he is dead."

"Oh! And you have not enlightened her with your vast knowledge?"

"I have come to the King for justice."

"From your own report, you have come to a place devoid of what you seek."

"I appeal, then, to your generosity."

He took a turn about the room, with hands locked behind him, and head upon his breast.

My brain gave a great mad whirl; the lights went out; the room was black as night. I braced myself with my sword, pressing my body back against the door, and presently, by force of will, I drove the faintness partly from me. Another spell like that and I should go under, I knew. As my sight slowly came back I turned, at the voice of a prompting within me, to Cadwaller. It is well I did so. He had taken a step from the wall, his sword partly drawn from its scabbard, and his face grinning in anticipated triumph. But when he saw me steady myself at last, he slid his blade back slowly and resumed his former attitude.

The King stopped suddenly before me and raised his head. "Why does Mistress Heron desire to be no longer the ward of the King?" he asked sharply. "You have been advising her, I suppose."

"I have taken the liberty to make this request without consulting with Mistress Heron, Sir."

"'Tis one of your weaknesses to take liberties, it would seem."

"'Tis like, Sir. I, like others, have my failings."

"Really! And you would make the failings of others an excuse for yours?"

"No, Sir. I have asked but that the lady may have freedom and justice. For such a request no excuse should be necessary."

"Indeed! You will pardon me for daring to express a contrary opinion," he sneered. "However strange it may seem to you, with your wisdom and fine sense of propriety, I must say that I consider such a *request*—as you are pleased to call it—not only quite unnecessary, but also outrageously insulting. I decline to be coerced by a mad ruffian. No, Sir! Leave the room!" He finished his sarcastic speech with head thrown back and arm stretched out angrily, as though to thrust me from him. The fact that his head was thus thrown back showed me clearly that he felt far from confident; for when a man's hair falls back of his shoulders, he will run rather than fight.

"Still a Stuart! You use a man until he is of no further service, then he is a mad ruffian when he asks for his reward. I had hoped for better from Charles Second, for he is said to be kind of heart. I was deceived, it would seem."

"Silence! Withdraw instantly or I shall have you put under arrest! 'Od's blood, what insolence!"

"No, Sir!" I snapped back savagely. "I refuse to go! Until now I have been speaking to the King, praying for what it should not be necessary to have; but now I speak as man to man—as Mark Everard to Charles Stuart! Silence! Call out and you are a dead man!"

Cadwaller sprang from the wall, half-drawing his sword.

"If the Earl of Cadwaller will come but one step nearer I shall take that for the signal to pass my sword through the body of Charles Stuart," I said quietly, for I did not wish my voice to reach the hall without.

The King drew back until his hips were pressing against the table, but still I kept my point but a few inches from his breast. The Earl stood still, and looked puzzled, glancing quickly from me to the King. Then his face changed suddenly, and he glanced toward the door.

"Nor may you go to the door, my Lord," I whispered, as I read his thought. "Toby stands there with orders to kill the first man that opens it. If I call out he will come, and you both shall be killed. I shall tell Sir Charles Rawley and his men that you were quarrelling and that we rushed in too late to save this gentleman from your sword, so we killed you to revenge his death. Sir Charles is not now within the house." (A lie is a pretty good thing under certain circumstances).

The King bit his lips for a moment. "Do you know what this outrage means?" he asked very quietly.

"My death, you would say, I suppose."

"Quite so. The rope."

"No, no," I smiled.

"No?"

"Do I look as though I should live for the tedious process of the law?"

"You may."

"No, Sir; I am dying or dead already. If I were to sit down I never should rise, I know."

"Pray be seated," he half-smiled.

"I have some matters to attend to. When I have done I shall comply with your request."

"You are a brave man, but a foolish."

"Unless I mistake, you would do the same, Sir, were you in my position."

"You flatter me."

"I hope not."

"What is our next move? I grow interested."

"There is a writing cabinet in that corner. I desire but a few lines, which will serve my purpose."

"You are moderate."

"Of necessity I must be brief."

"Pray take your point from my breast; you sway so I fear you will fall against me."

"You will please to make haste, Sir; I may further lose my reason, and so commit an indiscretion."

"Will you not take my word?"

"The King's or Charles Stuart's?"

"Which do you prefer?" He was still smiling as though I amused him. Zooks! I could but admire such a man, were he King or beggar.

"Charles Stuart's."

"'There is method in his madness,'" he muttered. "Well, so be it," he said aloud.

"You give me your word that you will make no effort to escape or attract the men without?"

"Yes, yes, I do. 'Od's fish! I thought you desired haste."

I lowered my point; he moved quickly to the cabinet, and began to write.

I turned again to Cadwaller. He was leaning against the wall again, his face showing naught but intense surprise. I stepped within a pace of him and looked him fairly in the eyes. The King's back was turned to us, but I could watch him in the mirror, which stood directly before me. As I saw his reflection I remembered the strange words that had been whispered in my ears a little time before, when I carried Mistress Heron from the arbour. "Watch that mirror closely," the unknown voice had said. Whence it came I could not tell. But it was a warning, I felt. I should watch. . . . Again I looked into Cadwaller's eyes. He was staring past me and down—in the direction of the table. His eyes were bright—almost joyful. I thought it might be a trick to induce me to turn my back, so I gave no sign that I saw his look.

"Your treachery, which should be the cause of your destruction, has proved to be your salvation, my Lord. Had it not been that the King has found you out and banished you secretly, I should have killed

you, as I must another knave, even blacker than you —if you can imagine such a one."

"You talk of villainy!" he sneered. "The man that held his sword against the King!"

"Ay, I held my sword against the King, as I would against myself, if I were in the wrong."

"More moralising!" He again glanced stealthily past me.

"You richly deserve your fate; and I only regret that it is not death, as is mine."

"And I only regret that I am not to have the pleasure of sending you to yours. But, you see, you take refuge behind petticoats, which are a great protection, you will admit." He seemed to be speaking slowly for a purpose, and he kept his eyes lowered, as though continuing his stealthy glances past me.

I said nothing for a moment, but took a sly glance into the mirror to see if I could discover the thing that so drew his Lordship's eyes.

The King still was seated at the desk, and the scratching of his pen came to my ears distinctly. Another sound I thought I heard, a very faint rustle, but I was not sure. I turned my eyes to Cadwaller again—and as they swept across the lower part of the glass I felt my thumping heart stand still, then rush again into its mad beating with a redoubled fury. My teeth clenched firmly, my head swam more giddily, I swayed to and fro more unsteadily, and the red mist again floated before my

eyes. There, crouched by the end of the table, from under which he had just crawled, but three paces behind me, the knife that had bitten me once already clutched in his bony fist, was that devil in human form—Julius. His eyes were blazing like those of an angry cat, his hair was tossed wildly about his deathly face, and his lips were drawn back in the grin of a nightmare.

"Ah," I thought, "my Lord thinks he has found a useful ally. Well may he glance slyly past me. Murdering dog, my revenge is coming quickly." I ground my teeth, but propped myself firmly with my sword and waited with expectancy.

"The Earl of Cadwaller would for the third time make himself a murderer," I whispered very low.

He looked up quickly, startled and trembling from a guilty conscience.

"Wh—what do you mean?" he stammered.

I smiled in his frightened face. "You would have me to believe that there is something behind me, which I should see, and if I should look, you would pass your coward's blade between my shoulders."

My words deceived him, as I meant they should. His look of fear passed off, and he lowered his head, and, I made no doubt, peered at the crouching fiend, who was stealing nearer. I kept an eye on him in the glass. His stare of hate was fixed upon my back—he evidently thought not of the mirror. He

was rising slowly and silently as he crept forward, his hideous grin becoming broader and fiercer as he came. For an instant he turned his look upon the floor, as though to measure the distance still separating him from his prey, then on he stole with the silence of a shadow, his eyes again fixed upon the middle of my back. I took a quick look at Cadwaller. I thought I saw him nod. Back to the glass I glanced. The devil was now but one pace distant. The King scratched heavily and quickly upon the paper—and I knew it must be his signature. I heard his chair slide back as he rose. Still I kept my half-blind eyes glued to the kindly glass. The black devil was scarce a foot away. At the sound of the King's rising he sprang to his full height, flashed back his knife above his shoulder, and hurled himself with his whole weight forward.

"There, Hell take you!" he snarled as his knife flew at my back.

"Beware!" the King shouted, and rushed toward us.

But I did not need the warning. As the murderer was almost upon me I sprang quickly to one side, well clear of his savage knife. I heard a heavy blow, a groan, and a snarl of rage ere I could raise my point. I stood well back, staring down at the struggling mass that had sunk heavily to the floor. For but a moment it struggled, then the knife sprang up again —but there it paused. Julius had realised his mis-

take. Until then he had been so blinded by his hate and the seeming certainty of his revenge that he had not discovered that the man into whose heart he had plunged his knife was not Mark Everard—but the Earl of Cadwaller.

With the snarl of a maddened dog he sprang from the body of his victim and faced me with features twitching and working horribly. He took one step toward me, his body crouched as though set for a spring; but my point was ready, and he cringed back a little, as I leaned, swaying, forward, smiling my satisfaction.

Not for an instant did I take my eyes from him, for it was a desperate dog, which now would take any mad chance. Watching the assassin so closely, I could not see the King, but I heard excited breathing coming from a few paces off, about equidistant from Julius and me. The red mist still was before my eyes; naught in the room could I see but the prostrate form of Cadwaller, which was twitching in its last struggle against dissolution, and the snarling devil with the knife and blazing eyes.

"At last, Julius, at last!" I grinned. "The wheel of justice turns very slowly, but in its own good time it makes a circle. Come, Julius, you must die." I drew my blade back slowly as I spoke, and took a step toward him.

He cringed from me and shot a sharp glance at the King. His eyes took on a cunning look, squint-

ing a little and dancing like those of a fox surrounded by the hounds. Some plan was in his head—a desperate plan. I thought I read it. Another step would prove me right or wrong. I took it—a short one. Yes, I was right. Again he cringed from me, and gained almost a pace. He was working his way toward the King.

"Ah!" I thought, "so that is your plan." I glanced toward his Majesty. He was standing beside the table and watching the tragedy with a horrified fascination. Julius was much nearer to him than was I. A ruse must be devised, or the crazed dog might do a thing that would fill the world with horror.

I heard a commotion at the other side of the door. Zooks! Mistress Heron's voice was there—she was demanding admission; and I think it was Sir Charles that remonstrated. Zounds! I made it out now. She was weeping and coaxing to be permitted to pass. I must act before she should enter, or there might be another tragedy! A growl from Toby came to me once or twice. He seemed trying to persuade the lady to remain.

"Nay, I pray, Madam," he said. "You may ruin all if you enter. He is able to take care of himself, I assure you."

"No, no; I heard him fall! Why, why are you all against him? I must, I will, pass!" Her voice was strained and desperate.

While this was progressing I was acting. It all was done in the counting of a score. I let my eyes half-close, my point slowly sink to the floor, swayed more unsteadily than before, and staggered back a step, reaching my hand out blindly, as though seeking a support. But all the while I watched the murderer's feet from under drooping lids.

The trick worked; he took a step toward me. I swayed more, staggered and lurched helplessly to one side. The King wakened from his trance and took a hasty step toward me. But Julius was before him. Catlike, silently, he took another cautious step, then drew himself together and made his murderous spring.

The King shouted, drew his sword and rushed in. "Ha, hell-bound, it is finished!" My blade was through the murderous dog, until the hilt struck heavily against his breast. His knife dropped harmlessly by my side; his hands and mouth opened and closed strainingly; his eyes rolled fearfully from side to side; his knees weakened; he swayed for a moment to and fro, clutched madly at my arm, and sank slowly to his knees—but still I did not draw out my steel.

The door flew open; Mistress Heron, wild-eyed and with hair dishevelled, rushed in, Toby, with drawn sword, at her side, while Sir Charles stood upon the threshold.

But one look the lady gave to the scene of horror,

then, with a gasp, staggered back upon Toby's arm.

Julius sank to his side, still clutching at my hilt. I drew the blade quickly from him. He raised a hand, still clawing, toward me, coughed horribly once or twice, drew up his knees, stretched them partly out, wriggled, trembled, and lay still.

"Take the lady to the next room. She should not have seen this sight." 'Twas the King that spoke. He stepped quickly to her side, as though to her assistance.

Ere he reached her I stood between them, swaying upon my sword, and facing the King respectfully, but determinedly.

"What now?" he asked in surprise, drawing back a little.

I put out my hand unsteadily toward him.

"Oh!" He smiled and handed the document to me. Charles Stuart could keep his word, it seemed, though the King of England could not.

I turned to Mistress Heron. Her hand was clenched upon her bosom, her face pale and colourless, and she shook from head to foot, as from an ague.

"Your freedom, Madam," I said thickly. "My work is done. I swore by God that I would save you. I have redeemed my pledge. The King is a generous gentleman,—as the whole world knows. They have maligned him that say he would—oppress

the weak. You are no longer the ward of the Crown, but his Majesty will see to it that you never again—shall be molested. I have caused you much alarm and pain, Madam, in the—management of this affair; but I can only—pray to be excused because of—my untimely weakness. I have lived in a hard world, but there are—two weeks of my life—I would live again. But I have fought the darkness—past my strength. It closes in. Before I go, I would cry—God save the King—from such another night—as this!"

All was black before me now. I felt that I was dying, that my soul was floating off through darkness—away from her.

I heard an oath; it sounded low and sympathetic. Yes, and then came Toby's gruff clearing of his throat. And hark! Zounds! that was my lady's weeping. I'd swear she was calling me back.

"'Tis a strange dark place," I whispered through the black distance; "but I'll try to behold you—when you sit—in the arbour—of an—evening."

"'Od's blood! that's one man in a million." 'Twas the King's voice.

Those were the last words that reached me through the gloom.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Two months of struggling against death, and at last the hold he had upon me slackened and fell off. Robust as had been my body, it had but withstood the raging of the fever—that was all. For another fortnight I was as helpless as a child. Then slowly but steadily I began to gain my strength, until at last, three months after the day on which the devil had taken his own, I found myself, after much pleading, seated in the arbour beside the little stream.

And for this calling back from the grave, into which I had felt myself sinking, I was indebted to a lady fairer than any that has gone before or will come after, and kinder than even a man's selfish heart could hope. Despite the efforts of the learned physician, despite the attention of Mistress Clinton—Mistress Heron's aunt from Canterbury—, and Toby's never-tiring watches, I never should have come through, I know, but for my lady's gentle kindness. For all this I could not thank her. Many times I tried, but my heart was full to overflowing, and when I would try to stammer out some broken words of gratitude, she always would stop me with a threat to vanish, not to come again.

But at last came the day, as I have said, when my

watchful nurse permitted me to sit beneath the trees beside the stream, among the flowers and the shrubs, where on that first morning she had given me her confidence and I had made my vow, and where, since, so much of moment had occurred. Now I was resolved that she should hear my gratitude. Whether she would or not, she should see that I was grateful; that despite the roughness of my nature, I was not what my outside might proclaim—a man of stone, without a heart. But careful I should be not to go too far, for I had not forgotten who I was nor what her station. I was still Mark Everard, an adventurer, who had had the honour of rendering a service to the noblest heart that beats; and she was still the fairest creature in the world, the kindest, and most pure; and she was grateful for the service I had rendered, and thought it greater than it was. I should crush my vanity, and not read wrong her acts and manner; they sprang from her gratitude and kindness—that was all.

Seated upon the same rustic bench as on that first morning, with the same surroundings—the leaves a little larger—, the sun peeping through here and there in the same spots, the bees humming over the same heaps of flowers, and the same white-robed maiden facing me, it was but with an effort that I could shake off the thought that the time was the same, that the morning was still the third of May.

For a long time I sat dreaming and taking in the perfect picture, my thoughts turning back to what they had been more than three months before.

"More than three months since," I mused. "Zooks! it seems but a day. And yet—and yet my life before that day is as a faint old memory, a story from the long, long past. Ah, dreams, dreams!" I sighed. "I must shake them off, and force myself back into that mouldy and rough old past."

I looked up quickly, as one that had come to a sudden resolve.

She dropped her eyes, and had a blossom in fragments instantly, and still she plucked at it vigorously. And she blushed—yes, I should swear to it!

I pulled at my mustaches thoughtfully and watched her.

"I wonder if I spoke aloud," I worried. "Zooks! I believe I did. Hum! back at my old tricks, eh. I must stop that."

Her manner seemed unnatural to-day. She was more reserved—not haughty nor cold, but almost timid and ill at ease. All the courage and independence that had been hers on that first morning, and afterward through the two terrible days, were gone, and left her almost fearful.

"What startled you?" she asked presently, without looking up.

"When?"

"When? Why, but now."

"Did I start?" My heart failed me for a moment.

She smiled.

"Oh, yes!" I plunged in determinedly. "I just decided that, now that I am recovered, I must be stirring. Three months! 'Tis a long time for me to be idle." I had not the courage to look at her. I tried to speak lightly, but my eyes turned off across the little stream.

She said no word, but I heard her move.

"And now that I must leave," I went on boldly, "that that causes me most thought is, how can I tell you my gratitude for the great and many kindnesses you have shown me? My tongue, Madam, is not trained so well as my sword, and I fear I may give offence by my clumsiness. I am but a rough, quarrelsome soldier, without skill in putting my feelings into words; and so I pray you——"

"Stop! stop!" she cried. "Speak not to me of gratitude! What little it has been my privilege to do during your illness I am thankful for. You have saved me from death and worse—much, much worse—and then you speak of gratitude! You have offered your life for me I know not how often—and yet you speak of gratitude! Oh, please, please say no more! By a miracle you have been saved from death, and have suffered so, so much—and then you speak of gratitude! What you have borne for me I cannot fully realise, but though 'tis such a debt as I never

can hope to thank you for, yet I regret not the indebtedness. To such a—friend 'tis an honour to be a de-debtor." She was greatly agitated, and the tears stood in her eyes when she ceased to speak.

I pulled at my upper lip perplexedly. I felt anything but comfortable. Zooks! what if I had been almost killed in fighting against her enemies? What man would not have done the same? What is a soldier's business if not to die? Zounds! I felt like a fool. That she should think she owed aught to me was too absurd. I would go through ten times as much, to hear from those red lips one little word of sympathy.

"But come," she smiled presently, "we must not speak of those fearful days and nights. They are past, but not sufficiently remote to contemplate without a gloom descending. Come, come, we must be gay or you never shall recover. And that you may be at ease and feel secure, without thoughts of flight disturbing, I now shall show you this." From behind her back she drew a neatly folded paper, and with a look of vast importance, and eyes sparkling merrily, she handed it to me.

"It looks like a warrant," I laughed. "You should place your hand upon my shoulder, and say: 'Ahem! In the King's name I——'"

"Pardon your monstrous sins!" she broke in, springing to her feet.

"What! All? Oh, no! this paper is too little.

'Twould take a volume to name them. This must be a petty offence."

"Read, read, read!" she commanded, pointing imperatively to the still folded paper. "How wicked you would make yourself! But, considering the reputation you give to Master Everard, I find that I cannot take his word for it. I therefore prefer what I learn from another source. And Toby's story is so different!" She was laughing now. Again she was her own self. Zooks! I should be careful. I felt my danger when I looked into those laughing eyes, so beautiful, so tempting in their tenderness.

"I'll choke Toby," I muttered.

"Choke Toby! I believe you would rather choke—say—even Martha."

I shifted uneasily. I remembered well the time when I should have liked to choke Martha.

"You must speak more respectfully of Toby, Sir; we have become fast friends. The poor, gruff, little man grew ten years older when he watched you struggling between life and death."

"But yet, he has maligned me," I frowned, with as good a show of seriousness as I could muster.

"Maligned you!"

"Ay, Madam; he would make you to believe me a saint."

"Oh!" she laughed. "But have no fear, Sir;

even Toby could not make me to think so falsely of you."

"Ah! I feel reassured," I smiled.

"Such a relief! is it not? But come, Sir, read, read!" She stamped her foot.

I opened the important-looking manuscript as directed.

"But it is addressed to you, Madam."

"Yes, yes; but read."

It was a letter. I glanced at the signature. My eyes grew wide in surprise. It was from the King. It was dated at Whitehall, in the end of May, and after the formal greeting, ran thus:

"Should it chance that he that lies near to death at Heron Hall be restored to health, it is my wish that you make known to him that the King can be generous sans necessity. Brave and honest men are so rare that it would be a monstrous folly to reduce their number by as much as one. I trust, therefore, that you, Madam, will rid me of a bold enemy and find me a staunch friend, which, I doubt not, you can accomplish without great labour."

I sat silent for some moments after reading these lines.

"No man is wholly bad, it would seem," I said presently. "Charles Stuart might have been a man of few faults, had he not had a King for a father."

"But why are you not glad with such news? I thought to give you so great and happy a surprise!"

Her voice and manner were reproachful, and her lips quivered, I thought.

"And you have surprised me, Madam. Surprise has tied my tongue and prevented me from thanking you. I——"

"Thanking me!" she broke in. "Will you never cease thanking me? You thank me for everything—even for what you have done for me. Not another word of thanks will I hear, Sir!"

I fought with my heart, but a few words escaped me. "Ah, but you are so kind, so kind!" I almost groaned.

She laughed uneasily. "And have I always been so kind?" she leaned forward and asked very gently.

My eyes fell before hers, and I grasped the arm of the seat to restrain myself.

"Always," I said with trembling voice.

Again she laughed uneasily. "Do you remember the first morning you were here? Do you remember when you found me at the little bridge?"

Remember! God! would I ever forget it? "Ay, Madam," I answered as calmly as I could, poking holes in the grass with my scabbard's point the while.

"Ah! was I so kind then?" she mocked.

I tried to break the dangerous course into which the conversation had drifted, by laughing.

"Do you remember how kind and gentle I was?" she persisted.

"Ah! you did let me see your temper that morn-

ing. Zooks! at first you would give no quarter. My surprise when I discovered you standing upon the great stone left me open to your sharp attack. Oh, I was fortunate to come off so well! Once I had a mind to run."

"Oh, oh! was I so terrible?"

"Terrible, I assure you!"

"And yet, so kind!" she laughed.

"Well, no, not at first," I admitted unwillingly. "But afterward you more than made up for your justifiable ill-humour by your confidence."

"Oh, how I hated you at first!" she volunteered.

"My looks are against me, I will admit." Of late this had become a tender point with me.

She was silent. I did not dare to look at her; but I suspect she laughed. And then, like a fool, I grew bitter. I thought of the barriers that kept me from her, how forbidding they were, and how the last three months had made made it impossible for me ever to be content with my old life again.

"But my appearance is in harmony with my life and work," I continued almost roughly. "My life has been harsh-featured, stern, and cold; so why should I not conform with it?"

"And why all this abuse and gloominess, pray? Did another dare hint at such slander—oh! 'Zooks!' you would cry, and that dear old sword would leap from its scabbard of its own accord! Come, come, I shall listen to such words no more.

If you become gloomy in the arbour, back to your bed you shall go, Sir. Remember, you are out conditionally."

"Forgive my ill temper," I asked sincerely; "I am but a growling ingrate, who——"

"Silence, Sir! I have scarcely finished scolding you for your offence, when you attempt to excuse it by repeating it with greater vehemence."

I put my hand over my mouth and laughed with my eyes.

"Yes, that is ever so much better than abusive words. You may not remove your hand until you have some thing pleasant to say." She shook her head solemnly and held up a finger to give her words greater weight.

For several moments I was silent, faithfully obeying orders. Presently, however, I caught sight of something that sent a thrill through my veins—a thrill that stirred my heart more than a greater thing might have stirred it. Instantly it was the third of May once more. I smiled as though I had found a long-lost friend. I raised my hat to greet him, but I had not the heart to strike. It was the same old butterfly that I had chased more than three months before. How do I know? Why, of course I know! I never forget a face. And what is more, he recognised me! Yes, I swear it! For until he saw me raise my hat, he bobbed along carelessly, up and down, from side to side, but steadily coming on, greedily eyeing the

flowers in Mistress Heron's hand; but the moment my hand left my mouth and moved toward my head, he dodged back quickly, sailed higher, until he floated a little above and behind a rose-bush. Now what other butterfly would have had the wisdom to take such a refuge? Oh, I am convinced that he remembered the trick he had played on me before.

"Well, well, well! My old friend is still alive!" I cried.

"Yes, that tone is quite satisfactory. You may remain out-of-doors. But where is your friend, pray?"

"There. He is in hiding behind that rose-bush. He fears another campaign against him, I doubt not."

"Who is it?" She turned to look, then glanced perplexedly at me, half-smiling and doubting my fruthfulness.

Again he dodged into view, taking a sly peep past one side of the bush.

"Oh!" the lady laughed, "and is this your friend? How do you recognise him?"

"There, I'm sure you have wounded his feelings! See, he is again in hiding. How could I fail to recognise him? His like is not in the park. Now," I added, "if he's as vain as he looks, that should fetch him out."

"Admirable!" she approved, as the butterfly

danced into view and came sailing toward us. "He's a perfect Malvolio!"

I may be a fool, but as I sat watching that purple butterfly a lump rose in my throat. I thought of that morning, months before, of the exciting days that followed, and of my weeks of sickness; and in all these pictures that came before my memory's eye the dear lady before me stood out in lines of courage, beauty and tenderness. How dear she had become to me in those months! Yes, from the first day I now knew I had worshipped her. Yet all would be of the past. In a few days I should be able to travel. No excuse had I to remain longer. Back into what now looked like savagery I should go to cherish her in my heart as the angel of a dream. And she would know nothing of the love that gnawed my soul out. She would think of me as a friend—an odd sort of a friend, mayhap,—with whom she had gone through great troubles and, yes, some happy hours. But not once would she think of love. Oh, no!—for she loved someone else. Surely she must love someone else, for she was made to love.

"Who can he be?" I wondered. "What is he like? Ah! young, handsome, graceful, and a man of fine speech—as different from me as day from night. But he is unworthy, whoever he may be; for who could be worthy of her? Ha! why could not a better face and manner have been given me? Gad! Cadwaller was right; I do look like a brigand.

The devil take me!" I snarled in sudden, childish rage, and stamped a hole in the grass with my heel.

"Oh, you frightened him away!" the lady cried. "He had just decided to taste of this bunch of flowers. And what is this? More ill temper? You are past redemption!" She shook her head resignedly. "But what's amiss? Come, tell me all about it." She leaned back in her seat, with eyes half-closed, dark red lips pouting temptingly, and her whole face half-smiling, as though humouring a discontented child.

My heart beat faster and my head swam as I looked upon her beauty. Zounds! such temptation was too great. I tried to turn my eyes away, but they would not. She saw my look, and must have read it, but she only smiled the more temptingly, and her full bosom rose and fell more quickly.

"Come, tell me of what troubles you," she repeated very low.

I clenched the arm of the seat and struggled with my heart. I saw my danger, and was sure she could not have the least suspicion of what my trouble was. I was determined I would not so abuse her sympathy and kindness as to let her know my secret; for then we both should be unhappy—now there was but one that suffered. But I felt that this was the fight of my life—Mark Everard had met his match. Despite me my lips parted and the words escaped; but I fought with my voice to make it calm.

"I—I must return to London," I stammered.

She still smiled, but more irresistibly than ever, for her colour heightened, adding beauty to the already perfect. And I had thought to see some little sign of regret, at least. My heart grew bitter quickly, but with the next breath I felt my will melting before those half-closed eyes, the sweetly pouting lips, and swelling bosom.

"When?" she asked gently.

"To-morrow—to-day—now!"

She was startled by this outburst. She sat erect quickly, stared at me for but a moment, then bowed her head and resumed her occupation of pulling the blossom into pieces. But from the part of her face that I saw I should be almost willing to swear she was smiling again. . . . Still, her breathing was faster.

"Wh—why?" she stammered.

"Ah, she does regret it!" I whispered to myself.

"Why?" she almost whispered, after a little silence.

For the shortest time imaginable she raised her eyes, then instantly they fell again; but the time was long enough to steal my remaining will.

"Because—because I—I love the sweetest, kindest, noblest lady in the world! Ah, Heaven, how I love her!" I whispered hoarsely. "Her like the world never has seen before, nor will again. Ah, she is so beautiful, so bright and young, and so, so

kind; and all unconscious of her virtues! And I —I have dared to love such an angel! Upon my honour, 'tis absurd! But she knows not that I love her, Madam—mayhap she would laugh if she should learn of it; and that would kill me. A sword-thrust were better. Yes, I know she would laugh, and with good right. 'Tis monstrous presumption in me to love her; but it is not my fault. God knows I fought it, fought it, fought it, but still it grew and thrived with opposition! But she knows not of it, nor even suspects that I could be so mad as to hope to pluck a star from out the sky. Nor shall she ever know—lest she should laugh.

Upon my soul, I thought I saw a tear fall to her hand!

"And why—why do you think she would laugh?" she asked very gently. "Can such a love cause laughter? If so, she—she is heartless and—unworthy."

"Unworthy! No, she is an angel!"

"Then she could not laugh at love."

"No, mayhap not from someone not so far beneath her as I!"

"And pray why are you beneath her?" Yes, I am sure the cheek I saw was smiling. "You are of gentle birth, untarnished honour, and courage greater than any other."

"To my birth I shall not object, though birth has little to do with a man; honour—not so little as to

cause avoidance; and courage—up to the average. But what are these where love is concerned? My lady would demand a young gentleman, a handsome face, and a tongue well schooled to converse on gentle topics. And I——"

"Yes, pray go on."

"And I have none of these qualifications."

"Oh!"

"I am of but middle height."

"Tall!"

"Too thick-set and awkward."

"Square and soldierly."

"I am harsh-featured."

"Strong and determined."

"And my tongue is rough, and more used to oaths than gallantry."

"Straightforward and sincere."

"And to crush the last spark of hope, I am fifteen years her senior."

"And very proper it is."

I wondered if she laughed at me. She looked sincere, but there was a twinkle of merriment in her eyes.

"So you see, Madam, why my heart is heavy. With such an array of obstacles, is it any wonder?"

"You have shown me no obstacles."

"What!"

"I brushed aside, one by one, all the imaginary objections you raised."

I laughed bitterly. "Little does she dream of whom I speak," I muttered to myself.

"And she is vastly rich."

"She should be thankful."

"Ah! but not so I."

"I fear you do not know your lady. Surely she is not as you paint her! First, she is not an angel, but very human; and next, she is not so foolish as to think soft words and well-turned phrases bespeak a noble gentleman; they rather bespeak the practiced courtier, of whom beware. Ah, Sir, I am sure you have misread her!"

I shook my head sadly. "Could you but see her as I see her! Ah, she is an angel! You do not know her. She does not know herself."

She laughed, a little uneasily, I thought. "I know her thoroughly."

"What! You know her—you—Madam?"

"Yes, I—that is—ah, I know what she must be like; all maidens are alike," she stammered.

"Oh!" I sighed. "But no—you wrong her; for she differs from all others of her sex as——"

"As 'one star differeth from another,'" she interrupted.

"Nay, as the sun differs all other lights."

"Ah, ah, you know her not! If she be a woman, a word of love will reach her ear."

"I dare not speak to her of love."

"Mark Everard not dare!"

"No, I dare not cause her pain. And so—I must go to London."

I am sure I saw her tremble.

"Is she—is she in London?" she asked very faintly.

I clutched the seat still tighter, but the words were drawn from me one by one.

"No, Madam,—no; I go—not to London, that I may—see her—but—but that I may—may escape from a temptation greater than my strength. Oh, God, I am beaten! You force me to speak! She is not in London, but here, here, here! 'Tis you I love! 'Tis you I worship! Now, now I have wounded you! Forgive me, but I could not help it! I could not! I could not! God forgive me for an ingrate! I have abused your hospitality and kindness! Forgive me! Forgive me!" I threw myself upon my knees before her and buried my face in my hands. My heart was wrung with love and anguish—love for the fairest creature on God's earth, and anguish for the pain my mad confession would cause her.

"And what—what shall I forgive you, love? Shall I forgive the noblest heart on earth because he thinks me worthy of his love? My brave, noble, great-hearted hero!" Her voice shook and came in an almost whisper.

My brain swam and my body trembled as her gentle fingers strayed through my hair caressingly.

"And you feared—you feared that your love

would wound me, dear? Ah, how little you have read my heart! Your love has made you blind, love, or you had seen my love in every glance. And you saw it not, nor heard it in my faintest word? Ah! it was there, dear. With every breath it went out to you—to the King of my little kingdom here." With one hand she brushed the hair back from my forehead, the other she held to her heart. Her lovely eyes were filled with tears; her voice was scarcely audible, but sweet, ah! sweet as the song of an angel.

For a time I could not speak; my heart leaped and my throat ached with a joy that bound my tongue and filled my eyes to overflowing. Slowly, fearfully, lest I should wake and find my happiness a mocking dream, I raised my trembling hands toward the blushing, smiling, lovely face. My fingers lost themselves in the falling coils of soft, dark hair; tenderly they touched the shapely, perfect head; gently, slowly she bent to me, her eyes looking into my soul.

"Sweetheart,—sweetheart,—darling," I whispered brokenly.

Her quivering eyelids closed; her trembling fingers pressed my cheeks; the full red lips parted gently, and with a little gasp of love, pressed, warm and soft, against my own.

"Sweetheart, is it, is it real?"

"Real, love, real, and everlasting! But I fear you made me unmaidenly when you made me force

you to speak. Ah, I have been very bold, I fear!"

I laughed and kissed her hands. "But how could I know that you could love me, sweetheart? When despite my will, the words sprang from my heart, I suffered torture lest I had caused you pain. The world was so dark then, sweetheart, and now I tremble with joy."

I held her close in my arms, and her fingers still ran through my hair.

"And you did not suspect my love, dear?" she whispered.

"For me? Ah, no; I thought it pity."

"Then I—I had a great advantage," she smiled, blushing more deeply and dropping her eyes.

"An advantage? What! You guessed?"

"You told me all, and so, so sweetly! In your fever you spoke of none but me, dear. And I——" she paused, drew my head closer, and whispered very low: "I—I kissed you. Was it—was it—very bold?"

"Very," I reproved. "And the only way you can make restitution is by permitting me to return your kisses."

She laughed and patted my cheek. "But you forced me to kiss you. You would not remain quiet unless I held your hand or stroked your head, or——"

"Kissed me?"

Her head nodded several times rapidly, and her eyelids remained drooped.

"Come, sweetheart, you must pay your debts," I whispered.

She threw her arms around my neck in an outburst of tenderness, and the tears of happiness fell hot upon my cheek.

A deep gruff voice, raised high in song, came floating through the trees and flowers from a little way up the winding walk. I started and hurriedly took my seat beside my sweetheart.

"Mark, it is dear old Toby. This is the first time I ever have heard him sing. Is it not strange that he should come singing so light-heartedly just now? It is as though he knew of our happiness. And, hark! it is the May-pole song. Ah! do you remember when last we heard it, dear?"

"Remember! 'Tis engraven on my heart."

The first verse came to an end as we spoke. The true-hearted soldier burst forth on the second.

"'You're out,' says Dick, 'Not I,' says Nick,
'Twas the fiddler play'd it wrong,'
'Tis true,' says Hugh, and so says Sue,
And so says ev'ry one;
The fiddler then began
To play the tune again,
And ev'ry girl did trip it, trip it,
Trip it to the men,
And ev'ry girl did trip it, trip it,
Trip it to the men."

I saw his head bobbing up and down above

bushes as he marched along in time with the song. Straight on, looking to neither right nor left, he came. His face was stern as ever, the bushy brows and bristling mustaches trying bravely to meet as he tossed his head at every second word. As he finished the last line he stepped from the path.

"'Od's life!" I heard him gasp, and his face flushed like a maiden's.

We held our heads bent forward, and watched him stealthily. He pressed his sword close to his side, turned noiselessly and tiptoed back again the way he had come, his face turned over his shoulder, and the honest features softening until they glowed with happiness. As he reached the path he paused, slowly uncovered his head and raised his face to Heaven. I could see his lips moving—yes, and I read the words. "God bless them," he said from his great warm heart. Then he glanced back at us again, smiled broadly, shook his head knowingly, as though to say: "Ah! I told you so," and crept up the path, congratulating himself on his escaping unseen.

"Dear old Toby! We have his blessing. Oh, oh how I love the whole, great world to-day, dear!" Tears of happiness, which can flow from a great heart only, were standing in her eyes. "And I love all and see beauty in all because you have filled my heart with goodness until it overflows. . . . Now, you will not go to London?"

"Here among the blossoms and the trees, sweet-

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heart, the sand of our life has started on its golden course; and here let us count each sparkling grain that falls, shielding the glass within the sacred walls of this true paradise, that the storms that sometimes rage without may not hasten the flight of this fairies' dream."

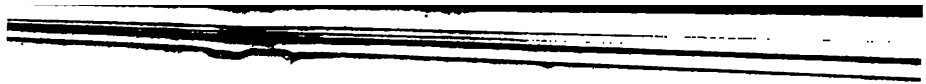
Her head was upon my breast, and my hand caressed the beauteous waves of hair. But now as I ceased to speak she looked up and, putting her little hand on each of my cheeks, studied my face with eyes of love. She shook her head slowly from side to side, her lips smiling and her eyes still tearful.

"Was ever woman blessed with the love of so noble a gentleman before?"

"Darling!—Sweetheart!—Angel!" I whispered.

"Listen!"

From far up the path, near the house, Toby's voice rolled out again. Every word sprang from a happy heart. But the voice came fainter as the song progressed.

"Then after an hour they went to a bow'r,
And play'd for ale and cakes,
And kisses too,—until they were due,
The lasses held the stakes.
The girls did then begin
To quarrel with the men,
And bade them take their kisses back,
And give them their own again;
And bade them.....kisses.....,
And .....them .....again."

The gruff old voice died out in the distance.